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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

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Carpenter grilled in Saif attack case, no arrest yet

MUMBAI, 17 JAN

Police are questioning a carpenter in the knife attack on Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan at his apartment in Mumbai's Bandra, while a Maharashtra minister on Friday ruled out underworld link to the stabbing incident. The 54-year-old filmstar is recovering well at Lilavati Hospital, where he was taken after the brutal attack by an intruder in the early hours of Thursday that left him with multiple wounds, and is expected to be discharged in two to three days, doctors treating him said. According to an official, the carpenter, Waris Ali Salmani, was picked up and taken to the Bandra police station for questioning after he resembled the intruder who stabbed Khan in his 12th floor apartment. Salmani had worked at the actor's flat two days before the incident. Hours after questioning, police took him to an undisclosed location.

Another official said the man brought to the police station for questioning was not related to the attack on Khan. No one has been arrested yet. More than 30 teams have been formed to nab the attacker, who is said to be between 35 and 40 years.*—PTI*

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BJP President JP Nadda launches 'BJP Sankalp Patra Part-I' for Delhi Assembly elections in New Delhi on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

BJP promises LPG at 500, ₹21K for pregnant women in Delhi

Manifesto says BJP will give ₹2,500 monthly for women

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

The BJP has launched the first part of its manifesto for the upcoming Delhi elections, scheduled for 5 February, emphasising women's welfare and senior citizens. BJP president JP Nadda presented the 'Sankalp Patra' at a press conference, asserting that the manifesto seeks to provide a foundation for a "developed Delhi."

Prominent features of the manifesto include a monthly aid of Rs 2,500 for women under the 'Mahila Samridhi Yojana', surpassing the AAP's offer of Rs 2,100. The BJP also promises Rs 21,000 for each preg-nant woman, alongside six nutrition kits through the 'Chief Minister Matritva Suraksha Yojana'. Additionally, the party plans to provide LPG cylinders at Rs 500 for impoverished households, including one free cylinder during festivals.

Expanded senior citizen pensions are also a highlight, with monthly support increased from Rs 2,000 to Rs 2,500 for those aged 60 to 70, and from Rs 2,500 to Rs 3,000 for those over 70, including widows and the disabled.

- As campaigning intensifies, the BJP, which has not held power in Delhi since 1998, is making significant efforts to unseat the incumbent AAP government.

Nadda vowed to investigate alleged corruption in AAP's welfare schemes and promised to implement the 'Ayushman Bharat' scheme within the first Cabinet meeting, complementing it with an added health cover of Rs 5 lakh.

Reacting to the manifesto, AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal accused the BJP of mimicking AAP's initiatives, while emphasising that Prime Minister Modi disapproves of the "freebies" promised by rival parties.

As campaigning intensifies, the BJP, which has not held power in Delhi since 1998, is making significant efforts to unseat the incumbent AAP government. Results will be announced on 8 February. *—PTI*

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Trouble brews as ED attaches ₹300 cr assets in MUDA case

NEW DELHI/BENGALURU, 17 JAN

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has seized over 140 units of immovable assets valued at approximate-ly Rs 300 crore in connection with a money laundering investigation linked to Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and others. This action is part of a probe into alleged irregularities in land allotments by the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA).

The seized properties are registered to various individuals, including real estate businessmen and agents, according to a statement from the federal agency. Allegations suggest that Siddaramaiah, a Congress party leader, misused his political influence to secure compensation for 14 sites in the name of his wife, Smt. BM Parvathi, in exchange for 3 acres and 16 guntas of land acquired by MUDA. Initially, the land was acquired for Rs 3,24,700, but the compensation, manifested as 14 sites in a prime location, is now valued at Rs 56 crore.

Siddaramaiah, who has faced questioning by the Karnataka Lokayukta regarding this case, has consist-ently denied any wrongdoing, asserting that the accusations are politically motivated.

Siddaramaiah *PHOTO: ANI*

The investigation has revealed that former MUDA commissioner DB Natesh played a significant role in the unlawful allotment of compensation sites to Parvathi. Searches have indicated that numerous other sites have been "illegally" allotted to real estate businessmen, who subsequently profited immensely, generating substantial amounts of "unaccounted" cash. The ED claims to possess incriminating evidence regarding illegal payments made to the then MUDA chairman and commissioner in various forms, including cash and property, during the raids. *—PTI*

Judgement in rape-murder of RG Kar doctor today

KOLKATA, 17 JAN

The much-awaited judgement in the brutal rape and murder of an on-duty doctor at RG Kar Medical College and Hospital, which led to nationwide outrage and prolonged protests, will be delivered on Saturday. Sanjay Roy, who was a civic volunteer with the city police, was charged with committing the crime on the postgraduate trainee at the state-run hospital in north Kolkata on August 9 last year. The judgement will be delivered on Saturday, 57 days after the trial commenced before the court of ad-ditional district and sessions judge, Sealdah court, Anirban Das. The Kolkata Police which was investigating the case initially arrested Roy on August 10, a day after the medic's body was recovered from the seminar room of the hospital.*—PTI*

US Supreme Court law to uphold TikTok ban

WASHINGTON, 17 JAN

The Supreme Court on Friday unanimously upheld the federal law banning TikTok beginning Sunday un-less it's sold by its China-based parent company, holding that the risk to national security posed by its ties to China overcomes concerns about limiting speech by the app or its 170 million users in the United States. A sale does not appear imminent and, although experts have said the app will not disappear from ex-isting users' phones once the law takes effect on January 19, new users won't be able to download it and updates won't be available. That will eventually render the app unworkable, the Justice Department has said in court filings. The decision came against the backdrop of unusual political agitation by President-elect Donald Trump, who vowed that he could negotiate a solution and the administration of President Joe Biden, which has signalled it won't enforce the law beginning Sunday, his final full day in office. Trump, mindful of TikTok's popularity, and his 14.7 million followers, finds himself on the opposite side of the argument.*—PTI*

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KARNATAKA HC RESERVES VERDICT ON BSY'S PLEA TO QUASH POCSO CASE

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

High Court on Friday reserved its verdict on former Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa's petition seeking to quash a Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO) case against him.

BJP leader dismissed allegations that he had intentionally delayed his plea until after the complainant's death, arguing that he could not have predicted when she would pass away.

The case was filed based on allegations by a woman who claimed that Yediyurappa had sexually assaulted her 17-year-old daughter during a meeting at his residence in Bengaluru in February 2024.

An FIR was registered by Sadashivanagar police on 14 March, 2024, before being transferred to the CID, which later filed a chargesheet.

Senior advocate CV Nagesh, representing Yediyurappa, countered the prosecution's argument that the former CM had deliberately waited until the complainant's death to file his petition. He stated, "She did not inform me when she would breathe her last. I am not a magician." After hearing all parties, the court reserved its verdict and extended the interim order until the final ruling.

—Salar News with Agencies

16 Indians fighting for Russia missing: MEA

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

India on Friday said 12 Indian nationals have been killed while serving with the Russian military and an-other 16 listed by Russia as missing.

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said a total of 126 Indians were serving with the Russian military and 96 of them have so far been discharged.

The MEA is in touch with the families of all the 16 Indians categorised as missing by Russian authorities.

This week, the MEA confirmed the death of an Indian from Kerala.

The death of Binil TB, who hailed from Thrissur, was first made public on Monday by one of his relatives. Jaiswal described Binil's death as "unfortunate".

The Indian embassy in Moscow is in touch with Russian authorities for bringing his body back, he said, adding that another resident of Kerala, who was injured, is currently being treated in a Moscow hospital.

Officials had confirmed the deaths of nine Indians till last year and Binil is believed to be the 10th casual-ty.

Following Binil's death, India pressed Russia to release all the Indians recruited by its military.

The Ministry also said that it is in touch with Washington to clarify issues pertaining to the possible impact that the latest US sanctions on Russia's energy sector could have on Indian companies.

MEA backs Army Chief's 'standoff' remarks

There is no contradiction of position on the situation along the Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) asserted on Friday, days after Army Chief Gen Upendra Dwivedi said a "degree" of standoff exists between Indian and Chinese militaries in the region.

Following an understanding reached on 21 October, the Indian and Chinese militaries sides completed the disengagement of troops at the two remaining friction points of Demchok and Depsang.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping held talks on the margins of the BRICS Summit in Russia on 23 October and agreed to revive various bilateral dialogue mechanisms, signalling an intention to normalise the relations.

Last month, NSA Ajit Doval travelled to Beijing and held Special Representatives talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the boundary dispute. At a press conference this week, Gen Dwivedi said there is still a "degree" of standoff between the Indian and Chinese militaries and both sides need to sit down and firm up a broader understanding on how to calm down the situation and restore trust. Jaiswal said that both the Army and the MEA are on the same page on the issue. *—PTI*

Israel security cabinet approves Gaza ceasefire deal

JERUSALEM, 17 JAN

Israel's security Cabinet on Friday backed a ceasefire agreement following Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's confirmation that a deal has been struck to halt the 15-month conflict with Hamas in Gaza and facilitate the release of dozens of hostages.

Mediators from Qatar and the United States announced the ceasefire on Wednesday, yet approval was delayed as Netanyahu cited last-minute issues attributed to Hamas. The militant group claimed to be "committed" to the agreement, as residents of Gaza and families of hostages anxiously awaited further developments.

The agreement is set to be presented to the full Cabinet of ministers for final approval. It is anticipated that the ceasefire will be ratified, potentially beginning as soon as Sunday, despite significant opposition from Netanyahu's far-right coalition partners, whose resistance could threaten the stability of his gov-ernment.

The conflict, which erupted on 7 October 2023 following a cross-border assault by Hamas that resulted in the deaths of approximately 1,200 Israelis, has led to devastating Israeli offensives, resulting in over 46,000 Palestinian fatalities, according to local health officials. The terms of the three-phase deal involve the release of 33 of the 100 hostages held in Gaza. *—PTI*

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INITIAL ESTIMATES SAID RS 10 CR

Armed robbers loot M'luru bank of Rs 4 cr

MANGALURU, 17 JAN

A gang of armed robbers looted valuables estimated over Rs 4 crore from the Sahakari Sangh Bank in Kotekar, Mangaluru, on Friday, police said.

Police earlier citing preliminary estimates said the stolen items were valued between Rs 10 crore and Rs 12 crore. Later in a release, they clarified it to be over Rs 4 crore.

This brazen heist follows a recent robbery in Bidar, where two armed assailants shot dead security guards while escaping with Rs 93 lakh in cash intended for an ATM.

The robbery occurred at approximately 2.30pm, with the assailants escaping in a car. Witnesses reported that a group of five to six masked men, aged between 25 and 35, entered the bank brandishing a pistol, a

sword, and a knife. Speaking in Hindi and Kannada, they threatened bank employees and forced them to open the vault, which contained gold jewellery and other valuables. At the time of the incident, six bank employees were present, but there were no security guards on duty. Two students were also threatened as they approached the premises, drawn by the commotion. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, present in the city, was promptly informed of the robbery and convened an emergency meeting with top police officials, including Inspector General Amit Singh and Mangaluru City Police Commissioner Anupam Agarwal. State Assembly Speaker UT Khadar, representing the region, also attended the meeting. He expressed concern over the bank's reputation and the impact such crimes have on the financial security of middle-class and poorer citizens. The Chief Minister has called for immediate action to locate the culprits, questioning security measures at toll booths that failed to prevent the escape. An extensive operation is now underway, with heightened vigilance across toll plazas o prevent the suspects from fleeing further. *—Salar News with Agencies*

Representational image *PHOTO: FREEPIK*

PHOTO: X

B'luru Metro to announce fare hike by 40% today

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

Passengers using Namma Metro are bracing for a fare increase, with the Bengaluru Metro Rail Corpora-tion Limited (BMRCL) set to announce a 40-42 per cent rise in ticket prices this Saturday. This decision follows a board meeting held at the BMRCL office in Shanthinagar on Friday, during which the proposed fare hike, recommended by the Fare Fixation Committee, was under review.

The committee's report, submitted over a month ago, considered public feedback and prompted the board to proceed with the increase. To mitigate the impact on commuters, the committee has also proposed various measures, including reduced fares on holidays, during non-peak hours, and specific times between 8am and 4pm, alongside occasional discounts on special days.

The board meeting, attended by ten members representing both central and state governments, focused on evaluating the financial implications of the fare adjustment and the proposed discounts, ensuring a balanced approach to revenue generation while addressing commuter concerns. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

Vijayendra warns against dissent in party

MYSURU, 17 JAN

BJP State President BY Vijayendra on Friday asserted that he would continue in his position despite ongoing dissensions within the party, and warned leaders particularly former minister Ramesh Jarkiholi. Speaking to reporters in Mysuru Vijayendra emphasized that the party leadership would address internal issues within the state unit. Vijayendra also predicted that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah would not complete his full five-year term, suggesting that he could resign at any time. He said Siddaramaiah had been undermining KPCC president Shivakumar by encouraging dinner meetings aimed at discrediting Shivakumar through statements from his supporters.—*PTI*

Nurse attacked in City for rejecting marriage proposal

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

A 23-year-old nurse was hospitalized after being attacked by a man for rejecting his marriage proposal in Jaga Jeevan Ram Nagar (JJ Nagar) police station limits on 12 January. The accused, Ajay, 29, a security supervisor, was arrested on Friday. The victim, Puja, who works at a private hospital, sustained injuries to her hands and legs but is now out of danger. Police said the couple had a brief relationship but mutually decided to part ways. However, Ajay continued to stalk and harass Puja, eventually attacking her when she refused his marriage demands. Following a complaint by Puja's mother, Rukshini, the police apprehended Ajay. —*Salar News*

Kalaburagi man gets lifer for rape & murder

KALABURAGI, 17 JAN

The 5th Additional Special District and Sessions Court has sentenced Manjunatha TU of Tekkalakote in Ballari to life imprisonment and a fine of Rs 20,000 for the rape and murder of a 60-year-old woman in July 2021. The incident occurred at Jeratagi bus stand in Yadrami taluk. Manjunatha, a cloth trader, raped the elderly woman who was sleeping at the bus stand and then fled the scene. A case was registered at Nelogi Police Station. The investigating officer, PSI Rajkumar, and CPI M. Sivaprasad submitted the chargesheet to the court. After examining 13 witnesses, Judge Chandrasekhar Karoshi pronounced the sentence. —*Salar News*

PHOTO: X

Aero India Expo: BBMP imposes curbs on crane height

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has announced restrictions on crane usage around the Yelahanka Air Force Station in preparation for Aero India 2025, which will take place from 1 to 14 February. A notification issued by the Joint Director of Town Planning (North) on Friday directs all high-rise construction projects within a 10kms radius of the venue to reduce crane heights and suspend their use during the event. BBMP said any violations of these restrictions will be dealt with under the BBMP Act 2020 and Section 91 of The Aircraft Rules, 1937, which regulate safety and operations near aerodromes. Aero India is one of Asia's largest aerospace exhibitions, featuring both military and civilian aircraft.—*Salar News*

No notice issued to Jarkiholi: Surjewala

He called the media reports 'false'

BELAGAVI, 17 JAN

AICC General Secy Randeep Surjewala urged media to refrain from spreading rumors, which he said were fueled by BJP-backed sources **PHOTO: ANI**

AICC General Secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala on Friday dismissed reports that State PWD Minister Satish Jarkiholi had been served a notice for hosting a dinner for party workers.

Speaking to reporters in Belagavi, Surjevala clarified that no notice was issued to Jarkiholi or any other minister, calling the reports circulated by BJP-affiliated media "false."

Surjevala, who is in Belagavi to oversee preparations for the Gandhi Bharat program to commemorate the centenary of the 1924 AICC conference chaired by Mahatma Gandhi, urged the media to refrain from spreading such rumors, which he claimed were fueled by BJP-backed sources.

The controversy began after Jarkiholi hosted a dinner for party workers, ministers, and legislators in Bengaluru earlier this month. Speculation arose that the minister had been served a notice for organizing the event, which became a point of focus amid discussions over the new state Congress president's appointment.

Jarkiholi, a key contender for the position, belongs to the Scheduled Tribe community, which holds significant political weight in the state.

At the time, KPCC President and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar was abroad, and the dinner led to rumours of internal factionalism within the party, particularly regarding the preference for Dalit and backward communities.

Home Minister Parameshwara, a Dalit leader, supported Jarkiholi's actions and criticised the restrictions placed on ministers hosting such gatherings, questioning the fairness of preventing party members from engaging in social events.

Surjevala further addressed the ongoing debate surrounding the KPCC president's position, asserting that the AICC was not involved in the matter and would not interfere with the state unit's leadership decisions.

—*Salar News*

Leadership skills essential for KPCC Chief post: DKS

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar has asserted that the position of Congress state president, which he currently occupies, is not merely something that can be desired but must be earned through leadership and organisational skills. Shivakumar noted that Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge is well-informed about developments in Karnataka."I did not seek these positions; such roles are offered based on leadership qualities within our party," he stated. Addressing concerns regarding internal discussions about changes to the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) leadership, Shivakumar made it clear that such matters should not be aired publicly, affirming that the party is capable of handling them internally.

He praised Kharge, for his impressive rise through the ranks, starting from block-level president to the national leadership. Shivakumar's comments come in the wake of state Public Works Minister Satish Jarkiholi advocating for a full-time Congress state president, claiming that ministers struggle to participate adequately in organisational duties. Jarkiholi's remarks followed a Congress Legislative Party meeting, where members were instructed to refrain from discussing leadership changes. —*PTI*

Congress leader Eshwar Khandre with family of Giri Venkatesh who was shot dead in Bidar **PHOTO: SALAR**

2 arrested in Hyderabad for Bidar ATM robbery

HYDERABAD/BIDAR, 17 JAN

Hyderabad police on Friday arrested two suspects in the killing if two security guards and looting Rs 93 lakh at an ATM in Bidar district a day ago.

The suspects had booked tickets on a bus to Raipur through a travel agency. The bus was scheduled to leave at 7.30pm and the duo was about to be picked up by the travel agency in a van.

When the travel agency staff checked the duo's bags, they found a large amount of currency notes inside. When questioned, they offered the staff money to hush up the matter. However, Karnataka police personnel present in the same pickup van noticed the cash. When they realised that police have spotted them, they opened fire in a bid to escape. A bullet hit the travel agency manager in the stomach. Another person present at the was also injured.

Meanwhile, District in-charge Minister Eshwar Khandre visited the house of Giri Venkatesh of Bemalakheda village, who was shot dead in Bidar. He said he has urged the Chief Minister to grant Rs 10 lakh compensation to the family in addition to Rs 8 lakhs from the social welfare department. —*Salar News*

FREE E-AUTOS

City Police Commissioner B Dayananda hands over keys to Free E-Auto beneficiaries at Police Commissioner's office in Bengaluru on Friday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

5,713 EV charging stations to drive adoption: Minister

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

Energy Minister K J George said on Friday that the State has set a benchmark in electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure.

Quoting recent data released by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency, he said, "We have the highest number of EV charging stations, an impressive 5,713 to boost electric vehicle adoption."

The minister was speaking at the Electric Vehicle Expo for Secretariat employees at Vidhan Soudha premises in Bengaluru. The event aims to raise awareness and promote EV usage among government staff.

"The rising petrol prices and urban air pollution make electric vehicles a key solution. Our state has been a pioneer in EV adoption and was the first in the country to introduce an EV policy in 2017," George said. —*PTI*

Ministers KJ George, Ramalinga Reddy at the EV Expo in front of Vidhana Soudha on Friday in Bengaluru **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

US consulate opens in City

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

DyCM DK Shivakumar with US Ambassador Eric Garcetti and EAM Jaishankar during the inauguration of the US Consulate, in Bengaluru **PHOTO: PTI**

After a wait of nearly two decades, the US Consulate in Bengaluru was inaugurated Friday, joining the first dozen foreign consulates in the city. Eric Garcetti, outgoing Ambassador to India, said the consulate will not be processing visa applications for now.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday said the opening of the long-awaited US consulate in Bengaluru was a very important milestone in the bilateral ties and urged the American authorities to ensure that the mission starts visa operations at the earliest.

He was in Bengaluru to attend the "site dedication ceremony" of the fifth US consulate in India, which will start operating in Bengaluru soon. "This will be my number one talking point with Secretary (of State Nominee Marco) Rubio when I go and see him. The sooner we get it done, the better it is," said Jaishankar. US Ambassador Eric Garcetti, said the consulate will not be offering visa services for the time being. Jaishankar pointed to statistics to nudge the US to get around to issuing visas from Bengaluru as early as possible. "I was checking figures... last year, the RPO (Regional Passport Office) Bengaluru issued 8,83,000 passports. That's for one year. Do the math, and you will see how important it is to ensure that travel is smooth," he said.

Jaishankar said a US consulate was "One, which I believe, Bengaluru legitimately deserved and expected.". —*PTI*

Caste census won't harm any community: Patil

MYSURU, 17 JAN

Senior Lingayat Minister MB Patil assured on Friday that the upcoming caste census report will not negatively impact any community. Speaking to reporters in Mysuru, Patil mentioned that the much-anticipated findings are expected to be presented in the next Cabinet meeting.

He also revealed that he has requested Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to ensure that all sub-castes within the Veerashaiva Lingayat and Vokkaligas are categorised together, rather than separately. The Chief Minister has assured to consider his request. Regarding the appointment of a new president for the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee, he stated that the decision rests with the party high command. —*Salar News*

BTP starts helmet safety awareness drive

Traffic police personnel have been stationed at key junctions, including Pulikeshinagar, Shivaji Nagar and KR Market **PHOTO: SALAR**

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

Following growing concerns raised by a recent Salar News article on the dangers of half helmets, the Bengaluru Traffic Police (BTP) has initiated a city-wide awareness campaign to educate two-wheeler riders on helmet safety.

Traffic police personnel have been stationed at key junctions, including Pulikeshinagar, Shivaji Nagar, and KR Market, to inform riders about the importance of wearing high-quality helmets that comply with Indian Standards Institute (ISI) norms.

The campaign focuses on educating riders about the dangers of using half-helmets and emphasizes the critical role of certified helmets in preventing head injuries during accidents.

In an earlier conversation with **Salar News**, Joint Commissioner of Police, Traffic, MN Anucheth, had stressed that using non-standard helmets would be treated the same as not wearing a helmet at all. Riders caught using unsafe helmets will face penalties under Sections 129 and 129(a) of the Motor Vehicles Act. The BTP plans to step up enforcement measures following the awareness campaign, with fines and other penalties for those caught using substandard helmets. —*Salar News*

SALAR IMPACT

A RECORD NUMBER

Kalaburagi to get 515 Anganwadi buildings

KALABURAGI, 17 JAN

PHOTO: X

- This move comes after Anganwadi activists protested the opening of pre-primary classes in government public schools, insisting that classes should be held in Anganwadis. The new buildings will be equipped with classrooms, a kitchen, a storage room for food items, and two toilets

The Women and Child Development Department has undertaken the construction of 515 new Anganwadi buildings in Kalaburagi.

Currently, there are 3,420 Anganwadi centres functioning in Kalaburagi, but only 1,960 of these have their own dedicated buildings. The remaining centres operate from school buildings, community halls, panchayat buildings, or rented properties. A total of 1,159 Anganwadis are being run in rented spaces.

In a Cabinet meeting held on 17 September, the approval was granted at a cost of 23 lakh each. The District Collector has allocated government land near existing Anganwadi centres for the new constructions. This project marks the first time in the district's history that such a large number of Anganwadis will receive new buildings.

The new buildings will be equipped with classrooms, a kitchen, a storage room for food items, and two toilets. Each plot allotted for construction measures 30X40 feet. The total cost of the project is Rs 23 lakh per building, with funding being sourced from multiple schemes: Rs 7 lakh under the Women and Child Development Department's ICDS (Integrated Child Development Services) scheme, Rs 8 lakh from the Welfare Karnataka Region Development Board (KKRDB), and Rs 8 lakh under the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme.

This move comes after Anganwadi activists protested the opening of pre-primary classes in government public schools, insisting that classes should be held in Anganwadis.

—*Salar News*

Missing boy found dead in Sarjapura pond

BENGALURU, 17 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

A seven-year-old boy Elvin Dsouza was found dead in a pond a kilometre away from his home in Sarjapura. Elvin, a special child with communication difficulties, had been missing since Thursday afternoon.

According to his mother, Elvin was last seen playing with his bicycle outside their home in Gempark Layout around 2:30 pm. After briefly attending to a technician, she returned at 3 pm to find both Elvin and his bicycle missing.

The family immediately launched a search and filed a missing person report with the police. CCTV footage showed Elvin near a water tank until 2:44 pm, but there were no further sightings of him. On Friday morning, Elvin's bicycle and slippers were found near a small pond in Mattanahalli. Police suspected he may have fallen into the water and recovered his body soon after.

Preliminary investigations suggest that Elvin accidentally fell into the pond while cycling. The missing person complaint has been converted into an unnatural death (UDR) case, and police are continuing their investigation to rule out foul play. —*Salar News*

Delhi HC junks Janta Party plea against ECI symbol

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Delhi High Court on Friday dismissed the Janta Party's petition challenging the election commission's order for reserving an election symbol only for recognised registered political parties. A bench of acting Chief Justice Vibhu Bakhru and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela said the issue raised by the petitioner was conclusively decided by the Supreme Court and the high court in other cases. The bench said according to the decisions, political parties could not consider symbols their "exclusive" property and it was clear the symbol could be lost by a party on account of their "dismal performance". The court said it found merit in the EC lawyer's contention that the issue was no longer res integra (question not examined). —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Budget session between 31 Jan and 13 Feb

JAIPUR, 17 JAN

The first part of Parliament's Budget Session is likely to be held between 31 January and 13 February, with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman set to table her eighth straight budget on 1 February. In line with the convention, the session will start with President Droupadi Murmu's address to a joint sitting of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha on 31 January, followed by the tabling of the economic survey. Sources said the second part of the session will be held between the second week of March and first week of April. The tentative period is from 10 March to 4 April. The first part of the session is marked by a debate in both Houses on the Motion of Thanks on the president's address. —*PTI*

Farooq's convoy car crashes into cow on expressway

JAIPUR, 17 JAN

A car in the convoy of former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah crashed into a cow on Delhi-Mumbai Expressway on Friday, police said. The National Conference leader was on his way to Ajmer from Delhi. No one was injured in the accident, police said. Deputy Superintendent of Police Ravi Prakash Sharma said the car collided with a cow near Bhandarej. Abdullah's vehicle was moving ahead and his journey to Ajmer was unhampered, he added —*PTI*

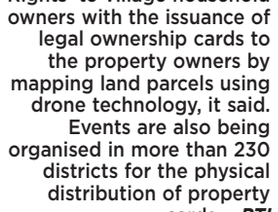


PHOTO: PTI

PM to distribute 65L SVAMITVA property cards today

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Saturday distribute more than 65 lakh property cards under the SVAMITVA Scheme, the Panchayati Raj Ministry said. According to senior officials of the ministry, beneficiaries from more than 50,000 villages in 10 states -- Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh -- and two Union Territories -- Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh -- will receive the cards. SVAMITVA, a scheme of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, provides a 'Record of Rights' to village household owners with the issuance of legal ownership cards to the property owners by mapping land parcels using drone technology, it said. Events are also being organised in more than 230 districts for the physical distribution of property cards —*PTI*

PM should accept freebies good for the country: Kejri

In a letter to PM, Kejri seeks 50% rebate for students in metro

AAP party leaders Sanjay Singh, Dilip Pandey, AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi Chief Minister Atishi during a press conference, in New Delhi, on Friday PHOTO: PTI

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

BJP has "copied" the AAP and announced several 'revris' in its Delhi poll manifesto but Prime Minister Narendra Modi won't approve of the "freebies" promised by his party, former Delhi chief minister and AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal said on Friday.

Addressing a press conference after BJP chief JP Nadda released his party's manifesto for the 5 February polls, Kejriwal said PM Modi should now accept he was "wrong" in criticising him for providing free handouts. "The BJP has repeatedly said that Kejriwal gives away free handouts, but today the BJP's national president announced that they too will provide free handouts to the people of Delhi," Kejriwal said, launching a scathing attack on the opposition party.

"I want to tell them that they should acknowledge that Prime Minister Modi was wrong when he said the things that he did about us. They should also accept free handouts are not wrong -- they are a gift from God and good for the country.

"Modi ji should come forward and assure he consents to these (BJP) promises. He should tell I was right in providing free handouts," Kejriwal said. In a letter to Modi, Kejriwal has demanded a 50 per cent rebate for students in Delhi Metro fares, hours ahead of the BJP releasing its manifesto for the Assembly polls in the city.

Later, addressing a press conference, Kejriwal announced free bus rides for male students if his party is re-elected in 5 February polls. The AAP government already provides free bus travel to women in the city.

Delhi High Court on Friday set 21 March to hear the enforcement directorate's plea against the bail granted to Kejriwal in the excise policy-linked money laundering case. Meanwhile, Congress on Friday alleged that the national capital has become a football in the "noora kushti" of AAP and BJP in the run up to the assembly elections. Delhi has a seen spate of frauds ever since the change in governments in 2013 and 2014, AICC chairman of Media and Publicity Pawan said. —*PTI*

Shehzad sorry for remarks on AAP MLA's surname

BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla on Friday apologised for his controversial reference to AAP MLA Rituraj Jha's surname, as his party sought to put a lid on the row. "I tender an apology with folded hands to all my Purvanchali brothers and sisters. My words have hurt them. I do not want to offer any justification," Poonawalla said in a video message posted on X, adding that he has a lot of respect for the hardworking people of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. In a heated discussion during a television news channel debate on Wednesday, Poonawalla had played on Jha's surname to take a jibe at him, a remark slammed as abusive by AAP.

IN HIS 1ST SPEECH

Kerala Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar delivers policy address at at 15th Kerala Legislative Assembly, in Thiruvananthapuram PHOTO: PTI

Dwindling Central grants burdening Kerala: New Guv

T'PURAM, 17 JAN

The budget session of the Kerala assembly commenced on Friday with Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar reading out the Left government's policy which claimed that the state was facing a liquidity stress due to declining share of union fiscal transfers.

In his policy address marking the commencement of the 13th session of the 15th Kerala Legislative Assembly, Arlekar said the state "has been facing stress on government finances" despite "earnest measures" for revenue mobilisation and rationalising expenses.

The reason for this was the "tapering of revenue deficit grants and cessation of GST compensation", he said while reading out the policy address prepared by the state government.

Arlekar said that the state government has highlighted problems faced by it and the ameliorative measures to the 16th Finance Commission.

Besides this, the Governor said the state government was also committed to rehabilitation of all those affected by the devastating landslides that hit Wayanad's Meppadi by ensuring completion of a township within one year.

The discussion on the motion of thanks to the Governor's address will be held for three days from 20 to 22 January.

Kerala Finance Minister KN Balagopal will present the Budget for the Financial Year 2025-2026 in the House on 7 February. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

BJP distributes Constitution copies at Maha Kumbh Mela

PRAYAGRAJ, 17 JAN

Leaders of the BJP's Uttar Pradesh unit distributed copies of the Constitution to sanitation workers at the Maha Kumbh Mela, emphasising the event's celebration of unity, a principle enshrined in the Constitution. This initiative is part of the "Samvidhan Gaurav Abhiyan," a nationwide campaign marking 75 years of the Indian Constitution, which aims to honour Dalits across the state.

Uttar Pradesh BJP secretary Abhijat Mishra stated that the event was meant to honour those whom non-BJP parties had historically viewed as mere vote banks. He asserted that the BJP holds genuine respect for such communities.

The celebrations coincided with the Samajwadi Party's announcement of a bust for late founder Mulayam Singh Yadav at the Mahakumbh, while Congress plans a rally on 27 January to challenge the BJP. Political dynamics are shifting, with opposition parties consolidating their stance on caste census issues, while the BJP seeks to regain momentum through community outreach at this significant religious gathering. —*PTI*

Vijay's TVK joins AIADMK, BJP in Erode bypoll boycott

CHENNAI/ERODE, 17 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

Actor-politician Vijay-led Tamizhaga Vetri Kazhagam on Friday said it would boycott the 5 February Erode East Assembly bypoll, days after main Opposition AIADMK, the BJP and DMDK took that stand.

The history showed that ruling parties win bypolls in the state by orchestrating 'regrettable politics' in an anti-democratic manner, TVK general secretary N Anand claimed.

In a statement, he further alleged that abuse of power by the ruling dispensation was several times more in bypolls than in general elections.

Hence, similar to the stand taken by the party as regards the Vikravandi bypoll, the party will boycott the Erode East byelection and would not extend its support to any party.

The AIADMK, BJP and DMDK had already announced that they would boycott the Erode East bypoll.

The constituency became vacant following the death of Congress leader EVKS Elangovan in December 2024, who represented that Assembly segment.

The filing of nominations for the Erode East bypoll commenced on 10 January, 2025 and on 18 January, nominations would be scrutinised. 20 January is the last date for withdrawal of candidature. The counting of votes would be taken up on 8 February.

ED ANNOUNCES

'MLA Lakhma didn't do anything to halt Chhattisgarh liquor scam'

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) announced on Friday that Chhattisgarh Congress MLA and former minister Kawasi Lakhma "did nothing" to halt an alleged liquor scam exceeding Rs 2,100 crore during the previous government's tenure.

Lakhma, 67, was arrested on January 15 following questioning in Raipur and has been remanded to ED custody until January 21. A six-time MLA representing the Konta assembly constituency, Lakhma previously served as the excise minister in Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel's Congress administration.

According to the ED, Lakhma was fully aware of the excise department's operations, including the alleged liquor scam, yet failed to take action against the illicit activities. The agency claimed he played a pivotal role in changing policies that facilitated the introduction of the FL-10A licence, which allowed holders to profit from the foreign liquor sector.

While being presented in court, Lakhma asserted his innocence, stating, "No documents or even a single penny were found during the raids conducted against me." He labelled the case against him as false.

The ED further alleged that Lakhma was a "key part" of the liquor syndicate and received "not less than" Rs 2 crore monthly from the proceeds of the crime between 2019 and 2022. The agency stated it had collected evidence linking Lakhma to the acquisition of immovable properties through these illicit gains.

Former Chief Minister Baghel condemned the arrest, claiming it was politically motivated and a strategy to malign Congress leaders. He expressed solidarity with Lakhma, accusing the ED of acting on directives from the BJP-led government. —*PTI*

Intellectual integrity threatened by RSS' conspiracies: Cong

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Jairam Ramesh PHOTO: PTI

The Congress party has raised concerns over the perceived erosion of intellectual integrity in India's premier universities. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh accused the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) of fostering a culture characterised by conspiracy theories and juvenile insults.

Ramesh referenced a recent media report highlighting the objections of several faculty members at Delhi University (DU) against a discussion of Ashok Shrivastav's 2024 book, "Modi vs Khan Market Gang," which took place on campus. "Intellectual integrity is under threat from the RSS's predilection for conspiracy theories," Ramesh stated, describing the event's endorsement by the Vice Chancellor as "an absolute disgrace" to DU, which he claims has become an extension of the RSS.

He further criticised new University Grants Commission (UGC) rules that enhance central oversight in the appointment of Vice Chancellors and permit non-academic appointments. According to Ramesh, these changes are designed to encourage "non-serious politicking" within educational institutions.

Earlier this week, Congress condemned the draft UGC regulations related to the appointment and promotion of university staff, labelling them "draconian and anti-Constitution." Ramesh expressed concerns over the removal of the limit on contractual professorships, warning that this could lead to widespread contractualisation, jeopardising the quality and independence of higher education in India. —*PTI*

KUKI-ZO APEX BODY SEEKS SEPARATE ADMINISTRATION IN MANIPUR

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

A four-member team of the apex body and political platform for all Kuki-Zo people in Manipur on Friday placed its demand before the Centre for a separate administration for the community and the initiation of a political dialogue to resolve its issues.

The demands were placed by a delegation, led by Henlianthang Thanglet, chairman, Kuki-Zo Council, before a two-member team of the Centre's representatives, led by interlocutor A K Mishra.

The Kuki-Zo community has been seeking a dialogue with the Centre to expedite a political solution over its demand for a Union Territory with a legislature under Article 239(A) of the Constitution for the community people living in the hill areas of Manipur.

To prevent future confrontations between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities, the council has been seeking complete adherence of the buffer zone by the Meiteis.

More than 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Meitei community and the Kuki-Zo tribals. —*PTI*

AMID INNOVATION CITY IDEA

CM: M'rashtra beat B'luru as startup capital

NAGPUR, 17 JAN

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis PHOTO: PTI

- Addressing a gathering at tech exhibition COMP-EX 2025 here, he also emphasised the need to adapt to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and asserted that his government was promoting startups

Maharashtra has surpassed Bengaluru in Karnataka and has become the startup capital of the country both in terms of numbers as well as value in the last one year, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said on Friday.

Addressing a gathering at tech exhibition COMP-EX 2025 here, he also emphasised the need to adapt to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and asserted that his government was promoting startups in this field.

"Maharashtra has surpassed Bengaluru and has become the startup capital of the country both in terms of numbers as well as value in the last one year. The state has the maximum number of startups. Maharashta is a leader in technology and most unicorns come to the state," the CM said.

In order to make Maharashtra the number one state in the innovation space, the government is setting up an 'Innovation City', Fadnavis said.

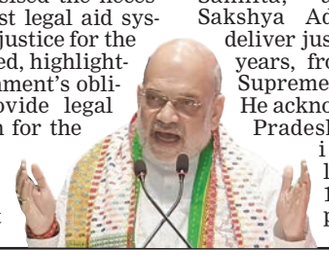
Maharashtra is also the fintech capital of the country, the chief minister said. —*PTI*

Shah backs absentia trials in national security cases

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Union Home Minister Amit Shah has called for the initiation of trial in absentia for fugitives who have evaded justice in national security cases. This recommendation came during a review with a delegation from the Madhya Pradesh government regarding the implementation of three new criminal laws.

Shah emphasised the necessity of a robust legal aid system to ensure justice for the underprivileged, highlighting the government's obligation to provide legal representation for the impoverished.



The Home Minister pointed out that the Indian civil security code supports trials in absentia for fugitive offenders. He urged Madhya Pradesh to utilise funds allocated under the Inter-operable Criminal Justice System (ICJS) in accordance with central government standards.

Shah outlined that the essence of the new laws—the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam—is to deliver justice within three years, from FIR filing to Supreme Court verdict. He acknowledged Madhya Pradesh's efforts in implementing laws and urged 100 per cent compliance. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

4 dead as truck rams into bus in Andhra Pradesh

CHITTOOR, 17 JAN

Four passengers were killed and 15 others injured in an accident involving a bus and a dumper truck in this district, a police official said on Friday. The accident occurred around 11.15pm on Thursday at Gajulapalli village in Chittoor district, he said. "Four passengers died on the spot and 15 were injured. Of them, four are seriously injured and 11 persons sustained minor injuries," Chittoor sub-divisional police officer T Sainath said. The Madurai-bound bus was coming from Tirupati with 26 passengers, he said. The truck hit the bus on its side, police said. Injured passengers were taken to CMC Vellore, SVIMS and other local hospitals, said Sainath. Police have registered a case and the truck driver is absconding, police said. *—PTI*

3 workers trapped under collapsed iron structure

BHUBANESWAR, 17 JAN

Efforts are on to rescue three workers believed to have been trapped for hours under the debris of a coal hopper, a large iron structure, which collapsed in a cement factory in Odisha's Sundargarh district, officials said on Friday. The authorities have been removing the debris with the help of cranes. The incident took place on Thursday evening due to the collapse of the coal hopper in the boiler area of the Captive Power Plant at Dalmia cement plant in Rajgangpur. The coal hopper was operated by a third-party vendor engaged by the company, it said. The plant operations team with the help of the district administration and is continuing rescue operations. *—PTI*

Medics strike work over suspension of 6 in WB hospital

KOLKATA, 17 JAN

A day after the West Bengal government suspended 12 doctors, including six postgraduate trainees, of the Midnapore Medical College and Hospital over the death of a woman after childbirth, all junior medics of the facility began an strike on Friday morning. The medics alleged that the decision of the state administration to suspend six junior doctors from the obstetrical-gynaecological (OBGN) and anaesthesia department was an attempt to divert attention from the corruption in the health department. Meanwhile, the West Bengal government on Thursday suspended 12 doctors of the MMCH for alleged negligence in connection with the death of a woman and four others falling ill after childbirth following alleged administration of 'expired' intravenous fluid. *—PTI*

African baboon dies in Delhi zoo, third death in 3 weeks

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

A female African baboon has died at the Delhi Zoo, the third animal fatality at the facility in as many weeks, officials said. The National Zoological Park, commonly known as Delhi Zoo, reported that the baboon named Chintu, which appeared lethargic on Thursday morning, was shifted to the veterinary hospital after it started shivering. An official said the animal died later on Thursday. "The cause of death is not yet confirmed. We are awaiting the report from the Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI) in Bareilly," said zoo director Sanjeet Kumar. Recently, a white tiger cub and a one-horned rhinoceros at the zoo have died. A senior zoo official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the cold weather may have been a factor in the deaths. *—PTI*

7 KILLED IN JALLIKATTU, MANJUVIRATTU IN TN

CHENNAI, 17 JAN

Six spectators, a bull owner and two bulls died in the jallikattu and manjuvirattu events held across Tamil Nadu on Kaanum Pongal day, police said on Friday.

While a bull died during the event in Pudukkottai, a bull owner and his bull died at Siravayal manjuvirattu in Sivaganga, the police said.

- At the manjuvirattu in Siravayal in Sivaganga district, a man from Naduvikottai Keela Aavandhipatti village and his bull drowned in a farm well at Kambanur while running from the arena

At the manjuvirattu in Siravayal in Sivaganga district, Thaneesh Raja of Naduvikottai Keela Aavandhipatti village and his bull drowned in a farm well at Kambanur while running from the arena.

Subbaiah of Devakottai was gored by a bull at the Siravayal event and died on the way to hospital. About 130 people were injured in the event.

P Periyasamy of Mettupatti village near Vadipatti died after he was gored in the neck by a bull in Alanganallur in Madurai. Around 70 people sustained injuries in the event, police said.

Two people were gored to death and 148 persons were injured in four separate jallikattu events in Tiruchirappalli, Karur and Pudukottai districts.

Kulanthaivelu from Samuthram near Kuzhumani in Karur district was gored to death in RT Malai, police said.

Police said C Perumal of Odugampatti near Keeranur was gored to death in the Mahadeva Patti jallikattu in Pudukottai district, where 10 persons were injured. About 19 persons were injured in the Vanniyan Viduthi jallikattu in Pudukottai district, they said.

A man died during Eruthu Vidum Vizha, a bull race conducted at Basthalapalli in Krishnagiri district, while another person was killed by a bull at Sentharapatti in Salem district, police said. *—PTI*

Participants at a Jallikattu event in Tiruchirappalli district, Tamil Nadu PHOTO: PTI

SC orders UP, Haryana to impose ban on crackers

Bench says drastic problems need drastic measures

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Terming the rising air pollution a "drastic" problem, the Supreme Court on Friday said the measures that are needed to deal with it should also be "drastic" and asked the UP and Haryana governments to impose a complete ban on firecrackers in their areas falling under the National Capital Region.

A bench of Justices AS Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan took note of the fact that like in Delhi, the Rajasthan government has also imposed a perpetual and complete ban on the sale and bursting of firecrackers in the NCR areas of the state and asked UP and Haryana to follow suit.

The bench said its earlier direction banning firecrackers would be extended till the next date of hearing in the matter, which is 24 March.

The bench said it will also hear the pleas against the ban of firms involved in the manufacture and sale of firecrackers on the next date.

When a lawyer requested the court to lift the complete ban as it also pertains to the manufacturers' fundamental rights, it said the environmental problems are more important than their issues. The lawyer then requested the court to at least allow green crackers. The bench also asked the Centre to respond to the pleas of the firecracker-manufacturing firms. *—PTI*

IN SUPREME COURT

The bench said its direction banning firecrackers would be extended till the next date of hearing on 24 March PHOTO: PTI

SC stalls order imposing Central scheme on Delhi

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

The Supreme Court on Friday stayed an order asking the Delhi government to sign a memorandum of understanding with the Union health ministry by 5 January to implement the PM-Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission.

A bench of Justices BR Gavai and Augustine George Masih issued notices to the Centre and others seeking their responses on the Delhi government's plea against the 24 December 2024 direction of the Delhi High Court.

Senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi appeared for the Delhi government. *—PTI*

Invoke suicide abetment charge sensibly, says SC

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Supreme Court on Friday said the offence of abetment of suicide under the Indian Penal Code should not be invoked mechanically against individuals only to soothe feelings of the distraught family members of the person who has died.

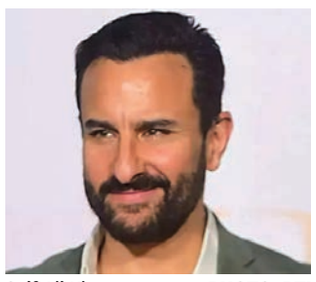
A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and K V Viswanathan said the investigating agencies should be sensitised so that persons were not subjected to the abuse of the process of a totally untenable prosecution.

The top court said the trial courts also should exercise "great caution and circumspection" and should not adopt a "play-it-safe syndrome" by mechanically framing charges, even if the investigating agencies in a given case showed utter disregard for the ingredients of Section 306.

The judgment came on a plea filed one Mahendra Awase challenging an order of the Madhya Pradesh High Court, which declined his prayer to discharge him from the offences punishable under Section 306 of the IPC. *—PTI*

BANDRA HORROR

Yogesh Kadam PHOTO: PTI



Saif Ali Khan PHOTO: PTI

No underworld link in Saif knife attack: Minister

MUMBAI, 17 JAN

Bollywood actor Saif Ali Khan, undergoing treatment at a Mumbai hospital after suffering injuries in a knife attack at home, is doing "very well" and is expected to be discharged in two or three days, doctors treating him said on Friday.

Police said they have detained a suspect in connection with the attack, while Maharashtra minister of state for home Yogesh Kadam said no underworld gang is behind the incident.

The 54-year-old actor, who received multiple stab injuries, including in his neck, underwent an emergency surgery at the Lilavati Hospital where he was taken after the brutal attack in his apartment in upscale Bandra by an intruder on early Thursday.

"We are observing his progress and he is doing excellently well... we have advised him bed rest and if he is comfortable, then in two to three days we will discharge him," said Dr Nitin Dange, neurosurgeon at Lilavati Hospital.

"Khan had three injuries, two on the hand and one on the right side of the neck. And the major part was at the back, which was in the spine... A sharp object was lodged inside, which has gone very deep, but it has not damaged the spinal cord," Dr Dange said.

Khan, his wife Kareena Kapoor and their sons Jeh and Taimur were in their 12th floor apartment in Satguru Sharan along with their five house helps at the time of the attack. Jeh's nanny Eliyama Philip, who first encountered the attacker, said he asked for Rs 1 crore.

The intruder did not force his entry or break into the actor's flat but possibly sneaked in at some point during the night with the intention of robbery, police said. *—PTI*

Nine die on Pune–Nashik Highway as minivan rams into stationary bus

PUNE, 17 JAN

At least nine people were killed after a tempo hit their minivan, causing it to ram into a stationary bus on the Pune-Nashik Highway on Friday morning, police officials said.

The accident occurred near Narayangaon around 10 am.

The minivan was heading towards Narayangaon when a tempo rammed the vehicle from behind, causing it to hit an empty bus parked on the side of the road, said Pankaj Deshmukh, superintendent of police, Pune Rural.

People near the wreckage of a vehicle after a tempo hit a minivan, causing it to ram into a bus on the Pune-Nashik Highway on Friday PHOTO: PTI

All nine occupants of the minivan were killed, he said, adding that more details are awaited.. *—PTI*

Probe half-done, accused still out: RG Kar victim's family

KOLKATA, 17 JAN

A day before a court in Kolkata is set to deliver its verdict in the RG Kar hospital rape-murder case, the parents of the slain doctor alleged that the investigation is half-done as others involved in the crime are roaming free.

The couple said they will continue to fight until justice is delivered to their daughter, whose body was found in the seminar room of the state-run hospital on 9 August last year, sparking nationwide outrage.

- The slain doctor's mother said she believed that the administration has been shielding several others involved in the crime.

Sanjay Roy, who was a civic volunteer with the Kolkata Police, was arrested on 10 August and charged with committing the crime. Additional district and sessions judge of Sealdah court, where the trial of the case concluded on 9 January, is scheduled to pass its judgement on Saturday.

"Sanjay (Roy) is guilty, and tomorrow's verdict will be against him. But what about other criminals who are still not caught? I have seen them loitering in the hospital. So, the investigation is half-done," the victim's mother said.

The woman said she believed that the administration has been shielding several others involved in the crime. "All the evidence was either lost or erased. A large number of people were present when... (police) visited the crime scene. Those seen at the crime scene must be punished," the mother said. *—PTI*

SHOWN IN BAD LIGHT

Protests mar 'Emergency' release in Punjab

CHANDIGARH, 17 JAN

Kangana Ranaut's film 'Emergency' was not screened at most cinemas in Punjab on Friday, following protests by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and Sikh organisations against the movie.

The SGPC and several other Sikh organisations held demonstrations outside cinemas and the malls across Punjab against the movie.

Ranaut, who has directed, written and produced the political drama, has decried SGPC's demand for a ban on the film and said its restricted screenings in parts of Punjab is a complete harassment of "art and the artist".

The film, which sees Ranaut playing the role of former prime minister Indira Gandhi, focuses on 21 months of Emergency from 1975 to 1977. The movie, in controversy over its censor certificate and allegations that it misrepresents the Sikh community, was released across the country on Friday.

Members of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee stage a protest against the release of Kangana Ranaut's film 'Emergency' in Amritsar PHOTO: PTI

Most cinemas in Ludhiana, Amritsar, Patiala, Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur and Bathinda did not screen the movie. Police force was deployed outside the malls and cinemas in the state.

In Amritsar, for instance, protesters were seen carrying black flags and placards saying "Emergency should be banned" and "Boycott Emergency movie".

"We spoke with the Central and Punjab governments to stop the release of the movie but no action was taken...," said SGPC's Partap Singh, adding that they had gathered to stop the film's release because it had been made to disturb the peace of Punjab.

"Sikh characters are portrayed objectionably," he said.

"Ranaut is a BJP MP. An MP should work to bring everyone in society together, but instead, she is creating divisions...," said Kulwant Singh Manan, another SGPC member. *—PTI*

Odisha govt to sign eight MoUs with Singapore

BHUBANESWAR, 17 JAN

Singapore President Tharman Shanmugaratnam is scheduled to visit Odisha for two days starting Friday, during which at least eight MoUs will be signed between the island country and the coastal state.

The Singapore President's visit is coming to Odisha just days ahead of the business conference Utkarsh Odisha: Make-in-Odisha conclave, slated for 28 and 29 January.

Accompanied by a high-level delegation, including ministers, MPs, and officials, President Shanmugaratnam will arrive in Bhubaneswar at 11.30am.

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, other ministers and senior officials will meet him in a hotel later.

In the afternoon, he will attend signing of the MoU seeking to extend cooperation in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to further enhance the skill development ecosystem, particularly for the semiconductor industry in the state, according to an official statement.

Another MoU will be signed between Odisha Industrial Infrastructure Development (IDCO) and Sembcorp, Singapore.

For the development of a new city, an agreement will be inked between the Bhubaneswar Development Authority (BDA) and Surbana Jurong, Singapore.

The pacts include skill development in the semiconductor sector. *—PTI*

FIERY RIDE

A man rides a horse through a bonfire as part of a ritual in honor of Saint Anthony the Abbot, the patron saint of domestic animals, in San Bartolomé de Pinares, Spain. This centuries-old tradition is believed to purify the animals for the coming year
PHOTO: PTI

India's satellite docking key step in future missions

India on Thursday morning successfully docked one satellite onto another, joining a small group of elite spacefaring nations to have carried out the complex technological feat in zero gravity.

Only the United States, Russia and China have carried out space docking missions, which allow separate satellites to work as a team, coordinating their tasks and sharing resources that can't be carried on one spacecraft.

The Indian mission, dubbed Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX), lifted off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in the country's southern Andhra Pradesh state on December 30, carrying two satellites, called Chaser and Target.

Like India's previous headline-grabbing space ventures – from landing on a challenging part of the moon to launching a Mars mission – SpaDeX was built and catapulted into space on a shoestring budget.

Space observers and astrophysicists told Al Jazeera that docking expertise was of "critical importance" to India's space ambitions and upcoming missions. But why is it a big deal?

Chaser and Target each weigh about 220kg. After being launched together on 30 December, the two satellites separated in space.

They flew 470km above Earth, where they were carefully placed in the same orbit – but about 20km apart. There, they tested a range of manoeuvres to prepare for the docking.

Then, Chaser slowly nudged towards its partner, Target, before they joined in the early hours of Thursday. The docking attempt was earlier scheduled for 7 January but was delayed by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) after the drift between the twin satellites was noted to be greater than expected.

Celebrations broke out at the ISRO headquarters while Prime Minister Narendra Modi also congratulated the space agency for "the successful demonstration of space docking of satellites".

After the landing of Chandrayaan-3 on the moon and following the launch of a solar probe, Aditya-L1, the Indian government allocated 10 billion rupees for future space projects ***PHOTO: PTI***

Modi described the docking as a "significant stepping stone for India's ambitious space missions in the years to come".

In the run-up to the mission, Jitendra Singh, India's science and technology minister, said the mission is "vital for India's future space ambitions". Singh was referring to an array of projects undertaken by ISRO that include sending a man to the moon by 2040, building India's first space station, and sending an orbiter to Venus.

Docking technology will be critical in assembling the space station and in crewed missions, providing crucial facilities including in-orbit refuelling and assembling heavy infrastructure in microgravity. "ISRO has demonstrated it is good at launching and putting things in orbit, as well as landing," said astrophysicist Somak Raychaudhury, vice-chancellor at Ashoka University on the outskirts of New Delhi. "Now, docking is an important part of upcoming missions – and ISRO is now graduating to a very, very significant level." In August 2023, the Indian mission Chandrayaan-3 became the first in the world to land near the moon's South Pole. Since then, ISRO's ambitions have only grown. The next phase of the moon mission – Chandrayaan-4 – will involve a capsule that will collect samples from the moon and then dock with a return spacecraft for the trip back to Earth. While ISRO keeps reaching for the stars, a report by Tracxn, a market intelligence platform, noted that the funding in India's private space sector plummeted by 55 percent in 2024 to USD59.1m from USD130.2m in 2023, a first fall in the last five years. (Reuters reported that the drop comes amid a global 20 percent decline in space sector investment.)

After the historic landing of Chandrayaan-3 on the moon and following the launch of a solar probe, Aditya-L1, the Indian government allocated the largest fund ever allocated by the country for future space projects – a kitty of 10 billion rupees – announced in October last year. ISRO earlier spent USD74m in sending the Mars orbiter and USD75m on last year's Chandrayaan-3. By comparison, NASA's Mars orbiter cost USD582m in 2013 while Russia's moon mission which crashed two days before Chandrayaan-3's landing cost USD133m. Or take a look at the budget of celebrated space-oriented thrillers like Christopher Nolan's Interstellar (USD165m) and Alfonso Cuaron's Gravity (USD100m). *—Al Jazeera*

SALAR سالار بنگلور

Ocean forces accelerate Antarctic ice melting

The size of the Antarctic ice sheet can be hard to comprehend. Two kilometres thick on average and covering nearly twice the area of Australia, the ice sheet holds enough freshwater to raise global sea levels by 58m.

Ice loss from this sheet is projected to be the leading driver of sea level rise by 2100, yet its contribution remains highly uncertain. While sea levels are certain to rise this century, projections of the contribution from Antarctic ice vary from a 44 cm rise to a 22 cm fall.

Much of this uncertainty is because the ocean processes that control the fate of the sheet occur on an incredibly small scale and are very difficult to measure and model.

But recently scientists have made significant progress in understanding this "ice-ocean boundary layer". At the margins of the Antarctic ice sheet, glaciers flow into the Southern Ocean, forming floating ice shelves. These ice shelves act as keystones, stabilising the ice sheet. They're also shrinking.

The ocean melts ice shelves from below – a process known as "basal melting". Increased basal melting has led to the thinning and retreat of the ice sheet in some regions, raising global sea levels.

It has also slowed the deepest current in the global overturning circulation, a system of ocean currents that circulates water around the globe.

Like the glaciers that feed them, ice shelves are immense. Yet the ocean processes that control basal melting, and the fate of the entire Antarctic ice sheet, occur on the scale of millimetres. They happen in a thin layer of ocean, just beneath the ice.

The boundary layer between the ice shelf and the ocean is cold, miles from anywhere, and beneath very thick ice, so it's no wonder it has hardly been measured at all.

Studying this layer with computer simulations is also a huge challenge. Until recently, the tiny motions within the ice-ocean boundary layer put accurate modelling of ice melt out of reach. These twin challenges have long stymied efforts to answer the deceptively simple question: "How does the ocean melt Antarctic ice shelves?" Computer simulations of ocean processes aren't new. But only recently have simulations of the ice-ocean boundary layer become feasible, as computing resources grow and the cost of using them shrinks. Researchers are looking for a relationship between what the ocean is doing, and how quickly the ice melts. So far, they've uncovered not just one relationship but several, each indicating a different melt "regime". Ocean conditions (temperature, salt content and the speed of ocean currents) and the shape of the ice determine which melting regime applies.

Ice sheet shape is key because meltwater is fresh and lighter than the surrounding ocean.

Like hot air collecting at the top of a room, fresh, cold meltwater collects in hollows in the lower surface of the ice sheet, insulating the ice from the ocean water below and slowing melting.

For steeply sloping ice, the insulating effect is much less. The energetic flow of meltwater as it rises under steep ice leads to mixing with the warmer ocean waters. This increases melting.Using sonar and cameras, these robots have revealed a weird and wonderful "icescape" on the underside of ice shelves.

This icescape is made of many different ice features, ranging from centimetres to kilometres in size. Some, like steep-sided crevasses, are formed by ice fracturing. Others, like dimpled depressions in the ice (often called "scallops"), stair-like "terraces", mussel-shaped "scoops", and larger basal channels, are thought to be formed by melt processes.

Our new knowledge of melting from computer simulations and robots sheds light on these features and how they form. The existence of melt regimes helps explain the evolution of steep-sided terraces, or why different features appear in distinct parts of an ice shelf.

For instance, in the warm, calm eastern part of the Dotson ice shelf in west Antarctica, an autonomous robot observed basal terraces. In the west of Dotson – which experiences cold, fast currents – large mussel-shaped scoops were discovered.

Exactly how some of these features form is still unknown.

Accurate representation of melt in climate and ice sheet models will reduce the deep uncertainty in sea level rise projections, especially as ocean conditions – and ice shelf melt regimes – shift into the future. *—PTI*

Two kilometres thick on average and covering nearly twice the area of Australia, the Antarctic ice sheet holds enough freshwater to raise global sea levels by 58m ***PHOTO: AI***

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Hamas-Israel truce brings relief, but trauma & displacement persist

After 467 days of violence, a ceasefire agreement between Hamas and Israel has been reached and will come into effect on Sunday, pending Israeli government approval.

This agreement will not end the war or bring about peace. Ceasefires are not a panacea for the war, trauma, displacement, hunger and death Israelis and Palestinians have borne before and since 7 October, and will no doubt continue to bear, long after.

While this is not the end of the story, this ceasefire does mark the start of a new chapter for Palestinians, particularly those in Gaza, and Israelis.

The terms of this ceasefire, at least for the first phase, are detailed, setting the stage for its effective implementation.

Unlike that truce, however, this agreement is envisaged to last longer, having three distinct phases, each lasting 42 days (6 weeks).

During the first phase, there will be a temporary suspension of military operations by Israel and Hamas, as well as the withdrawal of Israeli forces east towards the border between Israel and Gaza and away from densely populated areas.

There will also be a temporary suspension of air activity (for military and reconnaissance purposes) in the Gaza Strip, particularly when hostages are released.

Also, from the first day the agreement comes into effect, large quantities of humanitarian aid, relief materials and fuel will be allowed to enter Gaza. The fuel is necessary for the operation of Gaza's power plant and sanitation systems, and for heavy machinery to clear and remove rubble.

This will begin the long task of rebuilding the strip's decimated infrastructure, including hospitals, clinics and bakeries (the main food source for Gazans). Israel was arguably largely prepared to ignore the one political card Hamas held: the release of the hostages the group took on 7 October. Over the past 12 months, Hamas has agreed to the text of a ceasefire a number of times only to have the terms altered by Israel and no agreement reached. But because of the power differential, it has been relatively unsuccessful in pressuring Israel to agree to its demands.

To reach a deal, Hamas has forsaken its two main demands: full withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Gaza Strip and a permanent ceasefire.

This agreement has three phases. In the first phase, Israel will potentially release thousands of Palestinian prisoners in exchange for 33 hostages. Fewer than 60 hostages are thought to be left alive.

Palestinians celebrate the announcement of a ceasefire deal between Hamas and Israel in Deir al-Balah, central Gaza Strip ***PHOTO: PTI***

But it is telling that in the past, Israel has simply arrested other Palestinians or re-arrested many of those released under similar deals.

These type of strangle contracts happened during the Syrian civil war too. There, they were branded as reconciliation agreements.

These were effectively ceasefire agreements forced on rebel-held communities by the Assad regime and Russia after they had besieged, bombarded and starved them, sometimes for many years. The asymmetrical power relations of the parties to these agreements left communities with little to no bargaining power regarding their terms and implementation. On the 16th day after the agreement comes into force, indirect negotiations between the two sides will begin regarding the next phase of the agreement. This new phase is envisaged to include the release of more hostages and prisoners and the continuation of the ceasefire. However, there are currently no written assurances the ceasefire will continue beyond the first phase if there is no agreement reached for the second phase. For similar deals that were previously on the table, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made clear he would continue the war to destroy Hamas after the initial phase.

Further, the ceasefire agreement specifies that Israeli troops will withdraw east towards the border between Gaza and Israel. One of Hamas's original demands for a ceasefire with Israel was that Israeli troops withdraw from Gaza completely.

While it has since jettisoned that requirement, the ceasefire terms suggest that Israeli forces will remain in a buffer zone along the border more permanently. They may potentially also stay longer in the Philadelphi Corridor and along the Netzarim Axis.

In a territory only 40kms long and between five and 13kms wide, any continuing Israeli military presence on this Palestinian land means it cannot be used for civilian life, including for homes or farmland. This makes an already densely populated Gaza Strip even more so, as well as negating the rights of Palestinian land holders in these areas.

While ceasefires are not technically legally binding, they can perhaps best be thought of as a type of contract between warring parties.

This ceasefire, at least for the first phase, has detailed terms, including maps, that the parties have taken time (some would say too much time) to agree on. This makes the agreement more likely to be implemented as both sides can more easily be held to what they have agreed by external parties, including the ceasefire's guarantors, Qatar, Egypt and the US. The war between Hamas and Israel is of course not over. This ceasefire simply marks the start of a new phase.

It's a welcome relief and the least-worst option humans have so far devised to stop the violence of war for a period of time . But with more than 1,000 Israelis and 46,000 Palestinians dead, many more homeless, the Gaza Strip decimated and potentially millions with some sort of trauma, even if there is a halt in the violence, this is certainly not peace. Palestinians and Israelis, if not the world, will be living with the implications of the past 467 days for many years to come. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

S Korean officers seek arrest warrant for Yoon

SEOUL, 17 JAN

Law enforcement authorities on Friday requested a court warrant to formally arrest South Korea's impeached president, Yoon Suk Yeol, who was in his third day at a detention centre after his lawyers failed in a last-minute effort to secure his release. Yoon, who was apprehended on Wednesday in a massive law enforcement operation at his residence, faces potential rebellion charges linked to his declaration of martial law on 3 December, which set off the country's most serious political crisis since its democratization in the late 1980s. The warrant for Yoon's detainment, which was issued to compel him to face investigations after he repeatedly ignored summons by law enforcement, was valid until 9.05pm Friday. *—PTI*

Fire at California battery plant forces evacuations

MOSS LANDING, 17 JAN

Hundreds of people were ordered to evacuate and part of Highway 1 in Northern California was closed when a major fire erupted Thursday afternoon at one of the world's largest battery storage plants. As the fire sent up towering flames and black smoke and showed no sign of easing by Thursday night, about 1,500 people were instructed to leave Moss Landing and the Elkhorn Slough area, The Mercury News reported. The Moss Landing Power Plant, located about 124kms south of San Francisco, is owned by Texas-company Vistra Energy and contains tens of thousands of lithium batteries. There were fires at the Vistra plant in 2021 and 2022 that were caused by a fire sprinkler system malfunction that resulted in some units overheating. *—PTI*

Baldoni sues Blake, Reynolds for $400M

LOS ANGELES, 17 JAN

"It Ends With Us" actor and director Justin Baldoni has sued his co-star Blake Lively and her husband, "Deadpool" actor Ryan Reynolds, for defamation and extortion on Thursday in the latest move in a bitter legal battle surrounding the dark romantic drama. The suit filed in federal court in New York by Baldoni and production company Wayfarer Studios seeks at least USD 400 million for damages that include lost future income. It alleges that Lively and Reynolds hijacked the production and marketing of "It Ends With Us" and manipulated media to smear Baldoni and others on the production with false allegations of sexual and other harassment. The lawsuit comes about two weeks after Lively sued Baldoni and several others tied to the film, alleging they retaliated against her for coming forward about her treatment on the set. *—PTI*

China launches Pakistani satellite into space

BEIJING, 17 JAN

China successfully launched a Pakistani satellite into space from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center on Friday. The satellite, named PRSC-EO1, was launched at 12.07pm (Beijing Time) by a Long March-2D carrier rocket and entered its planned orbit successfully, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. The rocket also carried two other satellites - Tianlu-1 and Lantan-1. This launch marked the 556th flight mission involving the Long March carrier rocket series. China has been launching satellites for Pakistan in the last few years broadening their all-weather alliance into the space arena. *—PTI*

Ex-Pak PM Imran Khan, wife convicted in graft case

Khan sentenced to 14 years in prison; wife Bushra Bibi 7 years

ISLAMABAD, 17 JAN

A Pakistani court has sentenced former Prime Minister Imran Khan to 14 years in prison and his wife, Bushra Bibi, to seven years after finding them guilty of corruption linked to the Al-Qadir Trust case involving £190 million. The verdict was delivered by Judge Nasir Javed Rana in a makeshift court set up within Adiala Jail, where Khan is currently incarcerated.

In addition to the lengthy prison sentences, Khan was fined 1 million rupees, while Bibi faces a fine of 5,00,000 rupees. Should they fail to pay these fines, Khan could face an additional six months behind bars, with Bibi facing three months. The court also ordered the confiscation of land associated with Al-Qadir University, which was established by the couple.

In addition to the lengthy prison sentences Imran Khan is fined 1 million rupees, while Bibi faces a fine of 5,00,000 rupees *PHOTO: X*

Addressing the media following the verdict, Khan stated that the decision had damaged the judiciary's reputation, asserting, "In this case, neither I benefited nor the government lost. I don't want any relief and will face all cases," and labelled the situation as the result of a "dictatorship."

The National Accountability Bureau filed the corruption case against Khan, aged 72, Bibi, aged 50, and six others in December 2023. They are accused of causing a financial loss of 50 billion rupees to the national treasury. The case centres on allegations that funds returned to Pakistan by the UK's National Crime Agency as part of a settlement were misappropriated for personal gain, specifically benefiting a businessman who assisted Khan and Bibi in establishing the university.

While both stand prosecuted, several co-accused have avoided trial by leaving the country. The couple's legal troubles are further complicated by the ongoing discussions between the government and Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party aimed at addressing the political turmoil stemming from their imprisonment.

Khan has been in jail since August 2023 and faces numerous charges following his ousting as Prime Minister in 2022. *—PTI*

Putin and Iranian Prez hold talks ahead of treaty signing

MOSCOW, 17 JAN

Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Iranian counterpart Masoud Pezeshkian held talks in the Kremlin on Friday before signing a broad cooperation pact to deepen their partnership amid stinging Western sanctions.

Their "comprehensive strategic partnership treaty" covers all areas -- from trade and military cooperation to science, education and culture, the Kremlin said.

Pezeshkian's visit comes ahead of Monday's inauguration of US president-elect Donald Trump, who has pledged to broker peace in Ukraine and take a tougher stance on Iran, which is grappling with growing economic problems and other challenges, including military setbacks in its sphere of influence across the Middle East.

Iran President Masoud Pezeshkian with Russian President Vladimir Putin *PHOTO: PTI*

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov dismissed any link with Trump's inauguration, saying the signing had been planned long ago.

Welcoming Pezeshkian as they sat down for talks, Putin said the new treaty will "give an additional impulse to practically all areas of our cooperation". Pezeshkian emphasised that countries in the region should resolve their own problems themselves. *—PTI*

RUSSIAN COURT JAILS 3 LAWYERS OF SLAIN NAVALNY

PETUSHKI, 17 JAN

Three lawyers who formerly represented the late Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny were sentenced to prison on Friday as part of the Kremlin's intensified crackdown on dissent. Vadim Kobzev, Igor Sergunin, and Alexei Liptser received prison terms ranging from 3½ to 5 years for alleged involvement with extremist groups, linked to Navalny's networks, which were classified as extremist in 2021. Their case is perceived as a strategy to intimidate defence lawyers from engaging in political cases. Navalny, a vocal critic of President Vladimir Putin, died in a prison camp in February 2023. Human rights advocates from Memorial have classified the lawyers as political prisoners and are calling for their immediate release. *—PTI*

HAMAS-ISRAEL CEASEFIRE

Women chant slogans in support of the Palestinians in Gaza, outside the US embassy in Jakarta, Indonesia on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

Israel Minister threatens to quit if truce is approved

JERUSALEM, 17 JAN

Israel's hard-line national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, reiterated his stand to quit the government if Israel approved the ceasefire.

On X he said: "If the deal passes, we will leave the government with a heavy heart."

While Ben-Gvir's resignation would not bring down the government or derail the ceasefire deal, the move would destabilise the government at a delicate moment and could eventually lead to its collapse if Ben-Gvir were joined by other key Netanyahu allies.

Netanyahu instructed a special task force to prepare to receive the hostages returning from Gaza, and said their families were informed a deal had been reached. The prime minister's office said if the deal passes, the ceasefire could start Sunday when the first hostages could be freed.

Under the deal, 33 of some 100 hostages who remain in Gaza are set to be released over six weeks in exchange for hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

Israeli forces will pull back from many areas, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians would be able to return to what's left of their homes, and there would be a surge of humanitarian assistance.

The remainder of the hostages, including male soldiers, are to be released in a second -- and much more difficult -- phase that will be negotiated during the first.

Hamas has said it will not release the remaining captives without a lasting ceasefire and a full Israeli withdrawal, while Israel has vowed to keep fighting until it dismantles the group and to maintain open-ended security control over the territory.

Jaher Jabareen, head of Hamas' office responsible for prisoners, said on Friday that the names of those expected to be released from Israeli jails will be published, but didn't say when.

Longer-term questions about post-war Gaza remain, including who will rule the territory or oversee the daunting task of reconstruction. An Egyptian official and a Hamas official confirmed that the last-minute issues were over the list of Palestinian prisoners to be released from Israeli jails during the first phase of the deal, but those have now been resolved. Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private negotiations. The Hamas official said mediators showed the group Israel's approval. *—PTI*

UK orders audit on child sexual exploitation

LONDON, 17 JAN

The UK government has initiated a "rapid audit" to investigate the extent and nature of child sexual exploitation linked to grooming gangs, focusing on ethnicity data to understand the cultural and societal factors involved. Home Secretary Yvette Cooper announced the plans in the House of Commons, highlighting that many significant investigations have implicated "Pakistani heritage gangs."

In response to growing calls for a national inquiry, especially after criticism from Tesla CEO Elon Musk regarding the UK's handling of the issue, Cooper revealed that the Child Sexual Exploitation Taskforce will broaden the ethnicity data it collects. She acknowledged the inadequacy of existing data on both perpetrators and victims, stating, "The audit will examine ethnicity data and the demographics of the gangs involved."

The shadow home secretary, emphasised that authorities had historically ignored ethnicity-related data tied to child sexual exploitation, condemning a culture of "cultural sensitivity" that led to the systemic abuse of victims. Cooper assured MPs that the government is committed to enhancing support for victims, pledging stronger penalties for grooming gangs and rights for victims to request case reviews. Data estimates that over 115,000 child sexual exploitation offences were recorded in 2023, with 700 classified as group-based grooming gang offences. *—PTI*

'Biden won't enforce TikTok ban'

WASHINGTON DC, 17 JAN

US President Joe Biden will not enforce a TikTok ban mandated to take effect a day before he leaves office, placing the app's future in the hands of president-elect Donald Trump. The Biden administration is allowing Trump to handle the implementation of the law requiring TikTok's China-based parent company, ByteDance, to divest by 19 January.

Despite previously calling for a ban, Trump has pledged to keep TikTok accessible in the US, though his transition team has yet to indicate how they will proceed. TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew is expected to attend Trump's inauguration, where he may receive a prominent seating arrangement, suggesting a potential shift in policy regarding the app.

Incoming national security adviser Mike Waltz stated that while the federal law includes the option for a ban, it also allows for extensions if a viable acquisition deal emerges.

The bipartisan effort to save TikTok highlights the complexities surrounding the app, as Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer pushed for an extension, citing the need for more time to secure an American buyer. However, Republican Senator Tom Cotton opposed this, reiterating concerns about TikTok's ties to the Chinese government.

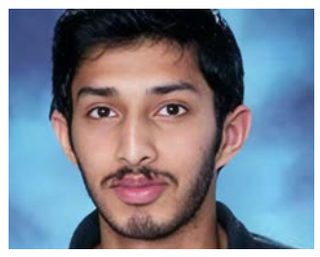
As legal challenges regarding the statute unfold, Trump's team appears ready to leverage TikTok's popularity for electoral gain, particularly among younger voters, while ensuring user data protection. *—PTI*

INDIAN NATIONAL SENTENCED FOR ATTEMPTED WH ATTACK

WASHINGTON DC, 17 JAN

Sai Varshith Kandula, a 20-year-old Indian national, was sentenced to eight years in prison for an attempted attack on the White House using a rented truck on 22 May, 2023. The Department of Justice revealed that his goal was to overthrow the democratically elected US government and establish a dictatorship based on Nazi ideology.

Kandula pleaded guilty to charges of willful injury to US property. The damage caused by his actions totalled approximately USD 4,322, covering the repair of barriers and cleanup of hazardous materials. *—PTI*



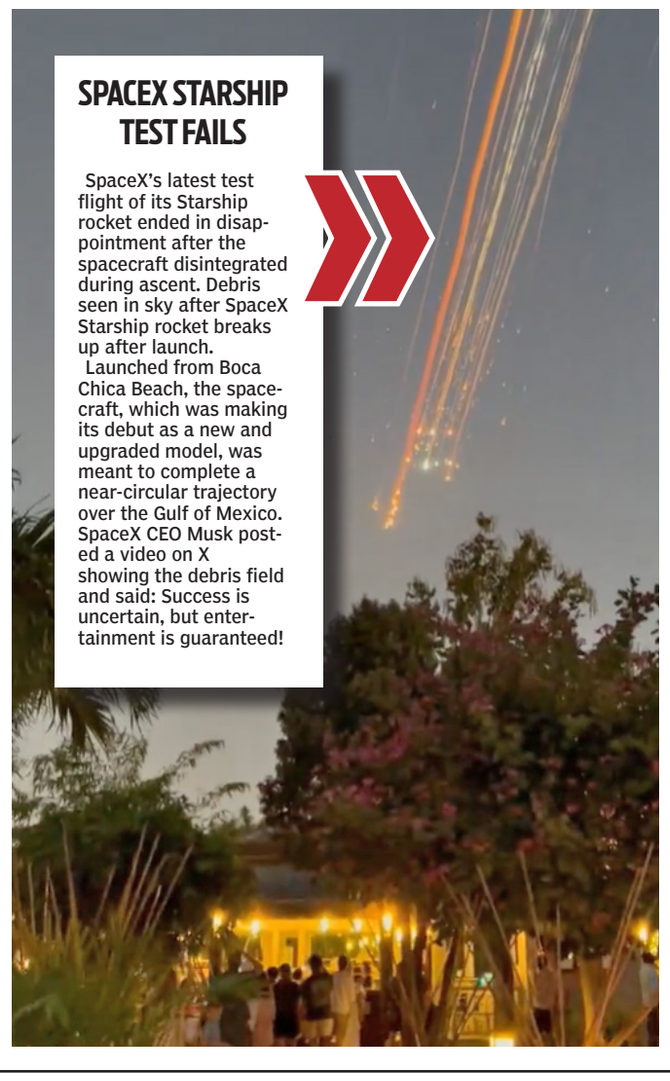
Sai Varshith Kandula *PHOTO: X*

Trump pick Noem under scrutiny

WASHINGTON DC, 17 JAN

South Dakota Gov Kristi Noem, Donald Trump's pick to lead the agency central to his vision of cracking down on illegal immigration, will face senators at confirmation hearing that will be her first chance to lay out her vision for the sprawling Department of Homeland Security.

Noem, a two-term governor and former US congresswoman, was chosen by the president-elect to lead the department responsible for key immigration and border-related actions that will be central to his plans for mass deportations and tightened access at the border. She would replace outgoing DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas. *—PTI*



SPACEX STARSHIP TEST FAILS

SpaceX's latest test flight of its Starship rocket ended in disappointment after the spacecraft disintegrated during ascent. Debris seen in sky after SpaceX Starship rocket breaks up after launch.

Launched from Boca Chica Beach, the spacecraft, which was making its debut as a new and upgraded model, was meant to complete a near-circular trajectory over the Gulf of Mexico. SpaceX CEO Musk posted a video on X showing the debris field and said: Success is uncertain, but entertainment is guaranteed!

20 JAN 1946 - 15 JAN 2025

'Twin Peaks' director David Lynch dies at 78

LOS ANGELES, 17 JAN

David Lynch, the filmmaker celebrated for his uniquely dark and dreamlike vision in such movies as "Blue Velvet" and "Mulholland Drive" and the TV series "Twin Peaks", has died just days before his 79th birthday.

The cause of death and location was not immediately available. Last summer, Lynch had revealed to Sight and Sound that he was diagnosed with emphysema and would not be leaving his home because of fears of contracting the coronavirus or "even a cold".

Lynch broke through in the 1970s with the surreal "Eraserhead" and rarely failed to startle and inspire audiences, peers and critics in the following decades.

- His notable releases ranged from the neo-noir "Mulholland Drive" to the skewed gothic of "Blue Velvet" to the eclectic and eccentric "Twin Peaks", which won 3 Golden Globes

David Lynch never won a competitive Academy Award *PHOTO: X*

His notable releases ranged from the neo-noir "Mulholland Drive" to the skewed gothic of "Blue Velvet" to the eclectic and eccentric "Twin Peaks", which won three Golden Globes, two Emmys and even a Grammy for its theme music.

Pauline Kael, the film critic, called Lynch "the first populist surrealist — a Frank Capra of dream logic."

"'Blue Velvet', 'Mulholland Drive' and 'Elephant Man' defined him as a singular, visionary dreamer who directed films that felt handmade," director Steven Spielberg said in a statement. Spielberg noted that he had cast Lynch as director John Ford in his 2022 film "The Fabelmans".

Lynch, who was married four times and had four children, never won a competitive Academy Award. He received nominations for directing "The Elephant Man", "Blue Velvet" and "Mulholland Drive" and, in 2019, was presented an honorary Oscar for lifetime achievement.

Aside from furniture making and painting, Lynch was a coffee maker, composer, sculptor and cartoonist. He exuded a Zen peacefulness he attributed to Transcendental Meditation, which his David Lynch Foundation promoted. *—PTI*

Gold jumps Rs 700 to Rs 82K/10 gms; nears record high

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Rising for the third consecutive day, gold prices on Friday surged Rs 700 to trade near a record high at Rs 82,000 per 10 grams in the national capital due to persistent buying in the local markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal had settled at Rs 81,300 per 10 grams on Thursday. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity continued to shine for the third straight day by jumping Rs 700 to Rs 81,600 per 10 grams against Rs 80,900 per 10 grams in the previous close. However, silver prices declined Rs 500 to Rs 93,500 per kg on Friday. The metal had ended at Rs 94,000 per kg in the previous trading session. Meanwhile, in futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold contracts for February delivery declined Rs 424 or 0.54 per cent to Rs 78,802 per 10 grams. *—PTI*

Rupee ends 1 paisa down at 86.62 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 17 JAN

The rupee traded in a tight range and settled 1 paisa lower at 86.62 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, as massive outflow of foreign funds and falling domestic equity markets dented investors' sentiment. A firm American currency and higher crude oil prices also weighed on the domestic unit, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 86.60, stayed rangebound between the high of 86.55 and low of 86.62 throughout the day and ended at 86.62 (provisional) against the greenback, 1 paisa down from its previous closing level. On Thursday, the rupee depreciated 21 paise to close at 86.61 against the US dollar. In two back-to-back sessions, on Tuesday and Wednesday, the local unit had gained 30 paise from its lowest-ever closing level of 86.70 against the dollar. *—PTI*

Former Miss India Vanya's AstroSure raises $6M

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Former Femina Miss India Vanya Mishra-led spiritual tech firm AstroSure.ai on Friday said it has raised USD 6M, about Rs 52 crore, from Netmeds founder and CEO Pradeep Dadha and others. The platform, launched in freemium model, claims to have attracted 1.5 lakh users during its beta phase. AstroSure.ai offers real-time, personalised astrology-based insights and tools to users. The platform offers AI-based virtual assistant Agastyaa to access services. Astrosureai Co-Founder and CEO Vanya Mishra said the spiritual tech market is at a key inflection point, and there is a need for increased transparency and hyper-personalisation *—PTI*

DoT launches Sanchar Saathi to tackle fraud calls

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Telecom Department on Friday launched Sanchar Saathi mobile app that aims to make it easier to report any suspected fraud communications by allowing public to flag such incidents directly from their mobile phone call logs. Announcing this, telecom Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia also launched two other initiatives of DoT – Vision for National Broadband Mission 2.0 and Intra circle roaming at 'Digital Bharat Nidhi' funded 4G mobile sites. DoT's Sanchar Saathi portal launched in 2023 has been an effective mechanism in the crackdown against fraud calls and the new app will double down on these efforts by ensuring a secure environment for subscribers. *—PTI*

Bharat Mobility Global Expo begins; 100 launches likely

Modi inaugurates India's largest mobility expo in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday inaugurated the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025, the largest mobility expo in India, which is expected to witness over 100 new launches across automobiles, component products and technologies.

The five-day expo is being held across three venues – Bharat Mandapam and Yashobhoomi in the national capital and India Expo Center and Mart at Greater Noida.

Modi inaugurated the Expo at Bharat Mandapam in presence of Union ministers Nitin Gadkari, HD Kumaraswamy, Jitan Ram Manjhi, Manohar Lal, Piyush Goyal and Hardeep Singh Puri, and leaders of the automobile sectors.

The Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025, scheduled from 17 to 22 January, will bring the entire value chain of the mobility ecosystem – from automobile manufacturers to components, electronics parts, tyre and energy storage makers, and automotive software firms and material recyclers -- under a single umbrella.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi visits the Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025 at Bharat Mandapam, in New Delhi *PHOTO: PTI*

- The event will have 5,100 international participants and is estimated to attract more than 5 lakh visitors from across the globe.

With a theme "Beyond Boundaries: Co-creating Future Automotive Value Chain", aiming to foster collaboration and innovation across the automotive and mobility sector with an emphasis on sustainable and cutting-edge technological advancements, the global expo will host over 9 concurrent shows, more than 20 conferences and pavilions.

In addition, the expo feature states sessions to showcase policies and initiatives in the mobility sector to enable collaborations between industry and at regional levels.

Bharat Mobility Global Expo 2025 aims to unite the entire mobility value chain under one umbrella.

The expo will have a special emphasis on the global significance with participation from across the globe as exhibitors and visitors.

It is an industry-led and government-supported initiative and is being coordinated by Engineering Export Promotion Council of India with the joint support of various industry bodies and partner organizations.

It will have 5,100 international participants and is estimated to attract more than 5 lakh visitors from across the globe.

In the luxury segment, German major Mercedes-Benz will launch its electric EQS Maybach SUV, while showcasing the electric concept CLA, and G Electric SUV.

Similarly, compatriot BMW will showcase the all-electric BMW i7 apart from launching its all-new BMW X3 among others.

Overall, more than 40 new product launches are expected at this main attraction of Bharat Mobility Global Expo, 2025. *—PTI*

DIGITAL BOOST

PHOTO: PTI

Cabinet approves refarming of 687 MHz of spectrum

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Union cabinet has approved refarming of 687 Mhz spectrum for mobile services and more will be done based on the study by committee of secretaries put in place by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, telecom minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said on Friday.

Speaking at an event of industry body COAI, the minister said that mobile services need 2,000 Mhz of spectrum by 2030 and the cabinet decision takes the total quantum of radiowaves to 1,587 Mhz.

"Yesterday's cabinet, we have approved refarming of 687 Mhz. Which means this takes us from 900 Mhz to 1,587 Mhz. 320 (MHz) will be released immediately, some by the end of next year and some by the end of 2028-29 which makes us ready for 2030," Scindia said at Digicom Summit 2025.

He further said the government will ensure that the requirement of the industry is met and there are no hurdles in the digital telecom landscape of the country.

"That leaves still a gap of roughly 300 (Mhz). So the ask is not over. The second round of this, Committee of Secretaries is working on it. Report will come by mid of this year. We will take that step to ensure that there are no bottlenecks for our digital telecom landscape to grow in India," Scindia said. *—PTI*

Decision on demerger of Vedanta likely on 18 Feb

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Mining conglomerate Vedanta Ltd on Friday said its shareholders and creditors will meet next month to decide on the proposed demerger of the company.

The approval of the demerger proposal will pave the way for the company's various business verticals to become separate entities.

The Bombay Stock Exchange-listed mining firm had last month revised its demerger plan and decided to retain its base metal undertaking within the parent firm.

A meeting of equity shareholders, secured creditors and unsecured creditors of Vedanta Ltd is "scheduled to be held on Tuesday, February 18... in the matter of proposed scheme of arrangement between Vedanta Ltd and Vedanta Aluminium Metal Ltd, Talwandi Sabo Power Ltd, Malco Energy Ltd, Vedanta Base Metals Ltd, Vedanta Iron and Steel Ltd", the company said in a regulatory filing.

PHOTO: X

The meeting has been scheduled pursuant to the order dated 21 November, 2024 of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), Mumbai bench, it said.

The company had earlier said post-demerger its existing businesses will be structured in six independent companies – Vedanta Aluminium, Vedanta Oil & Gas, Vedanta Power, Vedanta Steel and Ferrous Materials, Vedanta Base Metals and Vedanta Ltd.

However, later it revised the plan.

Vedanta had also said that the decision was taken following deliberations with stakeholders, including lenders, regarding the scheme and approval by the board of directors *—PTI*

Mkts snap 3-day winning run on selloffs

MUMBAI, 17 JAN

Key benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty slipped into negative territory on Friday after a three-day rally, dragged by selling pressure in Infosys, ICICI Bank and Axis Bank.

Unabated foreign fund outflows and elevated crude prices in international markets also played spoilsport for the bourses.

In a largely subdued session, the 30-share benchmark declined 423.49 points or 0.55 per cent to settle at 76,619.33. During the day, it tumbled 779.53 points or 1 per cent to 76,263.29.

Similarly, the NSE Nifty dropped 108.60 points or 0.47 per cent to 23,203.20.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Infosys dropped nearly 6 per cent despite raising its annual sales forecast for a third time this fiscal year.

PHOTO: X

Infosys Ltd, India's second-largest IT services firm, on Thursday reported an 11.46 per cent rise in the third quarter net profit on pick-up in demand, which also prompted the company to raise its annual sales forecast for a third time this fiscal year.

Axis Bank also declined by over 4 per cent post-earnings announcement.

Kotak Mahindra Bank, Tata Consultancy Services, Mahindra & Mahindra, ICICI Bank, Tech Mahindra, Bajaj Finance, HDFC Bank and Bajaj Finserv were the other big laggards from the pack.

In contrast, Reliance Industries climbed 2.50 per cent higher after the firm reported a 7.4 per cent rise in December quarter net profit as retail business rebounded, telecom earnings surged on higher tariffs and mainstay oil and petrochemicals business delivered consistent performance.

Zomato emerged as the biggest gainer, followed by Reliance, Nestle, Asian Paints and Power Grid. *—PTI*

Apple suspends AI news alerts

CALIFORNIA, 17 JAN

Apple has temporarily disabled a new artificial intelligence (AI) feature designed to summarise news headlines, following criticism over repeated inaccuracies and complaints from media organizations.

The feature, introduced in December, was intended to consolidate and rewrite previews of multiple app notifications into a single alert for users. However, it quickly faced backlash for generating misleading summaries, including one instance where an alert falsely claimed that Luigi Mangione, accused of killing UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson, had shot himself.

PHOTO: X

In response, Apple has now suspended the feature for news and entertainment apps. "With the latest beta software releases of iOS 18.3, iPadOS 18.3, and macOS Sequoia 15.3, Notification summaries for the News & Entertainment category will be temporarily unavailable," an Apple spokesperson announced.

The company clarified that AI-generated summaries for other app categories would continue, but with italicised text to differentiate them. *—Agencies*

Weaker rupee will inflate import bill, says GTRI

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

The weaker rupee will push the country's import bill due to higher payments for crude oil, coal, vegetable oil, gold, diamonds, electronics, machinery, plastics and chemicals, economic think tank GTRI said on Friday.

Citing an example, it said the depreciating domestic currency will increase India's gold import bill, especially as global gold prices have jumped 31.25 per cent, rising from USD 65,877 per kg in January 2024 to USD 86,464 per kg in January 2025.

Since 16 January, 2024, the Indian National Rupee (INR) has weakened by 4.71 per cent against the US dollar, falling from Rs 82.8 to Rs 86.7.

In the past 10 years, the INR has weakened by 41.3 per cent against the USD, falling from Rs 41.2 to Rs 86.7, the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said in its report.

PHOTO: X

In comparison, the Chinese Yuan depreciated by 3.24 per cent, from Yuan 7.10 to Yuan 7.33."Overall, weaker INR will inflate import bills, raise energy and input prices, leading to an overheated economy. Past 10-year export data says that weak INR does not help exports, contrary to what economists say," GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava said. *—PTI*

GAIL settles $1.8B claim with Gazprom

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

State-owned gas utility GAIL (India) Ltd has settled a USD 1.817-billion claim against a former unit of Russian energy giant Gazprom for USD 285 million, according to a stock exchange filing.

GAIL had in December 2023 initiated legal proceedings against SEFE Marketing & Trading Singapore Pte Ltd in the London Court of International Arbitration for non-delivery of liquefied natural gas (LNG) under a long-term contract. *—PTI*

SEBI bars PIFL, 6 others

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

The markets regulator SEBI has prohibited Pacheli Industrial Finance Ltd (PIFL) and six associated entities from participating in the securities market until further notice due to suspected financial irregularities and stock manipulation.

In an interim order issued on Thursday, SEBI disclosed that PIFL secured loans totalling Rs 1,000 crore from non-promoter entities, which were converted into equity through a preferential allotment of over 51 crore shares. However, investigations revealed these transactions were deceptive, with funds being round-tripped among the parties involved, allowing PIFL to issue shares without genuine financial backing.

PHOTO: PTI

All six have had their shareholdings frozen, and PIFL has been barred from the capital markets. *—PTI*

Rail operators to see double-digit growth in FY25

MUMBAI, 17 JAN

The logistics industry in India is anticipated to witness double-digit revenue growth for rail operators, while the warehousing sector is projected to achieve a 3–5 per cent year-on-year increase in organic rentals this fiscal year, according to a report released by India Ratings (Ind-Ra) on Friday. Demand for Grade-A warehousing space is expected to remain robust.

The report forecasts that coastal movement of goods and global container freight will support port volumes, bolstered by easing geopolitical tensions and the normalisation of US-bound traffic. However, profitability for container freight stations is likely to remain stagnant due to heightened competition and the shift towards direct port delivery.

Ind-Ra expressed a positive outlook for the logistics sector through FY26, driven by government investments across various transport modes alongside expected improvements in operational efficiency for integrated logistics firms. *—PTI*

BIG EV PLANS

Maruti Suzuki unveils its first eSUV; to export to 100 countries

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) on Friday unveiled its first battery electric vehicle (BEV) eVITARA, which will be exported to over 100 countries.

Speaking at the unveiling of the model at the Auto Expo, held as part of the Bharat Mobility Show, Suzuki Motor Corporation (SMC) Representative Director and President Toshihiro Suzuki said eVITARA would be exported to various regions, including Europe and Japan.

The SMC, which has around 58 per cent stake in the MSI, plans to make India a global production hub for the model.

"We plan to begin production of the eVITARA at Maruti Suzuki's Gujarat plant. From here, we will export to more than 100 countries, including Europe and Japan," Suzuki said.

Toshihiro Suzuki, President, with Hisashi Takeuchi, MD and CEO of Maruti Suzuki India Ltd *PHOTO:X*

In India, the automaker will utilise all its resources to build a BEV ecosystem to offer customers an experience with total peace of mind, he stated.

This will ensure that customers feel very comfortable and confident when making the BEV choice, Suzuki said.

eVITARA is Suzuki's first global strategic battery electric vehicle, which has been long-awaited in India and many parts of the world, he added.

Suzuki noted that the company has been studying customer requirements for BEV all over the world, particularly in its key business regions – India, Japan and Europe.

Based on the study, the automaker aims to make BEVs attractive to customers through a three-step strategy, Suzuki said. *—PTI*

Suzuki launches 3 electric scooters

Two-wheeler maker Suzuki Motorcycle India Pvt Ltd (SMIPL) on Friday launched its first electric scooter e-Access, as well as two other models at Bharat Mobility Expo 2025. Expanding its presence in the Indian two-wheeler market, SMIPL has taken a significant step towards electric mobility with e-Access. Besides, the company launched Gixxer SF 250 Flex Fuel, its first E-85 fuel-compliant motorcycle for the Indian market. E85, also known as flex fuel, is a blend of gasoline and ethanol. Suzuki Motor Corporation, Japan, Representative Director and President Toshihiro Suzuki said India is the largest market for the company. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

FIFA bans Panama FA Chief over fat-shaming remark

PANAMA CITY, 17 JAN

FIFA suspended the president of Panama's soccer federation for a fat-shaming comment about a star player in the women's national team. Manual Arias suggested midfielder Marta Cox was "fat" after she made critical comments about the set-up at the national team, which qualified for the 2023 Women's World Cup. The ban removes Arias from a series of men's national team games in the CONCACAF region: Nations League games in March, two 2026 World Cup qualifiers in June and the Gold Cup tournament in the United States scheduled 14 June -6 July. Panama reached the final of the men's 2023 Gold Cup, losing to Mexico. Arias said Thursday on social media his ban was because of "unfortunate" comments in March 2024. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

LIV Golf gets network TV partner deal with Fox Sports

WASHINGTON, 17 JAN

LIV Golf finally has a network TV partner as the Saudi-funded league enters its fourth season, announcing a multi-year deal with Fox Sports to broadcast all three rounds across its channels and streaming app. Terms of the deal were not announced, and it was not clear if Fox was paying a traditional rights fee to LIV Golf. LIV said more than half of the league's schedule would be shown on Fox or FS1. Select rounds will air on FS2, Fox Business Network and the network's app, along with subscribers to the LIV Golf+ app. LIV said "nearly all" of its competition would be carried live on various Fox platforms. *—PTI*

EU court ruling challenges CAS & FIFA authority

GENEVA, 17 JAN

A significant opinion from the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) risks undermining the authority of Swiss-based sports bodies like FIFA. The European court's Advocate General has advised that national courts in EU member states should have the authority to review decisions made by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), based in Lausanne, Switzerland. This recommendation arises from an ongoing legal battle initiated by Belgian club RFC Seraing and investment fund Doyen Sports, challenging FIFA's rules against third-party ownership of player registration. Should the EU court confirm this opinion, it could dramatically alter the current arbitration framework that obliges athletes and clubs to accept CAS verdicts. With FIFA already facing scrutiny from previous rulings under EU competition law, this development could reshape the relationship between sports governance and European legal standards. *—PTI*

India reach final of PD Champions with win over Pak

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

India sealed their spot in the final with a fantastic five-wicket win over Pakistan in the Physically Disabled (PD) Champions Trophy in Katunayake, Sri Lanka. With four consecutive victories, India have consolidated their position on the top of the points table. Pakistan posted a competitive 138/5 in 20 overs after opting to bat on Thursday. Jithendra VN was the standout performer with the ball, taking 3 wickets for 25 runs in his 4 overs, while Narendra Mangore and Sunny provided valuable support, claiming one wicket each. Saif Ullah anchored Pakistan's innings with a solid knock of 58 runs off 51 balls. India will next take on England on Saturday. *—PTI*

BCCI shakes up men's team with new rules

The new guidelines include travel, baggage limits, family visits, and team dynamics

BCCI stated that the decision to stop players from 'personal shoots or endorsements' during series or tour will ensure that their focus remains on cricket PHOTO: X

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has issued strict guidelines for the Senior Men's Cricket Team, aiming to enhance discipline, streamline logistics, and promote team unity during domestic and international tours.

The new guidelines include travel, baggage limits, family visits, and team dynamics.

Players are expected to travel with the team for all matches and practice sessions. Separate travel arrangements with families are discouraged to maintain discipline and team cohesion. Any exceptions must be pre-approved by the head coach and chairman of the selection committee.

"All players are expected to travel with the team to and from matches and practice sessions. Separate travel arrangements with families are discouraged to maintain discipline and team cohesion. Exceptions, if any, must be pre- approved by the Head Coach and Chairman of the Selection Committee," BCCI stated.

The family travel policy is designed to balance players' personal well-being with team commitments. Players who are away from India for more than 45 days during overseas tours are eligible to have their partners and children (under 18) join them for one visit per series, with a maximum duration of two weeks.

In the statement, BCCI stated that the decision to stop players from "personal shoots or endorsements" during series or tour will ensure that their focus remains on cricket. *—ANI*

Stung by a series of loss, BCCI has cracked its whip and tightened the rules for players. The guidelines come with warning that non-compliance will lead to sanctions. Here are all the new rules:

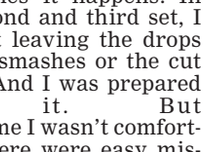
- Players must travel with team for matches and practice
- Domestic cricket mandatory for national selection
- No separate travel with families
- Players must remain with team until the tour ends
- Exceptions need pre-approval from the head coach
- No personal managers, chefs, assistants, security on tours
- Additional costs for separate arrangements to be borne by players
- Compulsory attendance at BCCI's official shoots, promotional events and functions
- No personal promotions during tours

A LIMIT ON BAGGAGE

AWAY TOURS (OVER 30 DAYS
- Players: 5 pieces (150 kg max)
- Support staff: 3 pieces (80 kg max)

AWAY TOURS (UNDER 30 DAYS)
- Players: 4 pieces (120 kg max)
- Support staff: 2 pieces (60 kg max)

HOME SERIES:
- Players: 4 pieces (120 kg max)
- Support staff: 2 pieces (60 kg max)



FAMILY STAY LIMITED

Players away for over 45 days can have partners/ children visit once per series (up to 2 weeks)

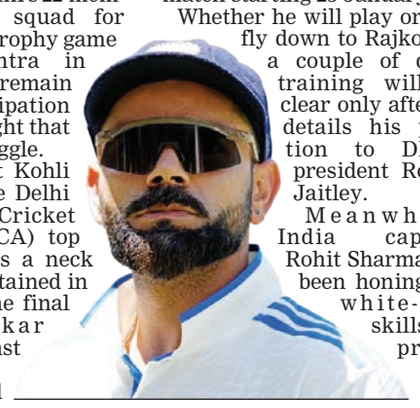
BCCI covers shared accommodation; all other expenses borne by players

Ranji Trophy: Kohli named in squad for Delhi's next game

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Star batter Virat Kohli has been named in Delhi's 22-member provisional squad for their next Ranji Trophy game against Saurashtra in Rajkot but doubts remain about his participation after it came to light that he is nursing a niggle.

It is learnt that Kohli has intimated the Delhi and Districts Cricket Association (DDCA) top brass that he has a neck niggle that he sustained in Sydney during the final Border-Gavaskar Trophy Test against Australia.



He was treated by the physio there and as of now, there is no clarity on availability for the Ranji match starting 23 January.

Whether he will play or just fly down to Rajkot for a couple of days' training will be clear only after he details his position to DDCA president Rohan Jaitley.

Meanwhile, India captain Rohit Sharma has been honing his white-ball skills in preparation for the upcoming ODI series against England and the Champions Trophy.

In a video on Instagram, the 37-year-old was seen playing his signature shots, including flicks, drives, lofted hits, and pulls against the white ball during a training session.

Following a disappointing tour of Australia, during which he even dropped himself from the final Test in Sydney, Rohit has been training with Mumbai's Ranji squad.

Mumbai face Jammu and Kashmir on 23 January, but Rohit's participation in the match remains in doubt. *—PTI*

India Open: Sindhu bows out in quarterfinals

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu was left disappointed after her gallant fight ended in a narrow loss to Paris bronze medallist Indonesia's Gregoria Mariska Tunjung in the women's singles quarterfinal at the India Open Super 750 here on Friday.

Sindhu, a former champion, fought back strongly after a one-sided opening game loss but faltered in the decider, going down 9-21, 21-19, 17-21 in a gripping 62-minute contest.

"It is sad definitely that I lost in the third set after fighting so hard but I think the game is such. I have to obviously come back stronger but at that point I would say anybody would have got that point or lost that point," Sindhu told reporters.

"There were long rallies. I have to be more consistent and keep the shuttle in the court. But sometimes it happens. In the second and third set, I was not leaving the drops or half smashes or the cut drops. And I was prepared for it. But first game I wasn't comfortable, there were easy mistakes."

Tunjung dominated early using her delectable drops to good use to race to an 11-4 lead at the break.

With Sindhu struggling with her strokes, it was all over too soon. *—PTI*

Bopanna, Zhang advance; Osaka retires with injury

MELBOURNE, 17 JAN

Indian tennis player Rohan Bopanna and Chinese partner Shuai Zhang progressed to the second round of the Australian Open mixed doubles following a convincing 6-4, 6-4 victory over Ivan Dodig and Kristina Mladenovic.

The duo showcased their skills on the court, taking just 72 minutes to secure their win.

They will now face the winners of the match between American Taylor Townsend and Hugo Nys of Monaco against wild card Australians Maddison Inglis and Jason Kuber in the next round.

In singles action, Naomi Osaka's tournament ended early as she was forced to retire from her match against Belinda Bencic due to a strained abdominal muscle.

Indian tennis player Rohan Bopanna & partner Shuai Zhang PHOTO: PTI

After losing the first set in a tight tiebreak, Osaka stopped the match, indicating her ongoing struggle with an injury that has plagued her since last year. Osaka expressed her disappointment, having not reached the third round of a major since 2022.

Meanwhile, reigning champion Aryna Sabalenka continued her strong performance, defeating Clara Tauson 7-6 (5), 6-4, marking her eighth consecutive win of the season. Sabalenka's victory sees her through to the fourth round alongside other notable players such as Alexander Zverev and Carlos Alcaraz.

As the tournament unfolds, Bopanna seeks redemption after a previous early exit in the men's doubles, while Osaka hopes for a swift recovery ahead of upcoming events. *—PTI*

K'taka aim to silence Karun, eye 5th Vijay Hazare Title

VADODARA, 17 JAN

Karun Nair's strong run in the tournament has been such that Karnataka's primary strategy will be to keep the big-scoring Vidarbha captain quiet in their quest to bag a record-equalling fifth Vijay Hazare Trophy title here on Saturday.

Nair has notched up scores of 112, 44, 163, 111, 112, 122 and 88, all but one unbeaten knocks, in his last seven batting innings and his tally now stands at 752 runs at a stunning average of 752.

It is the most by a captain in the history of Vijay Hazare Trophy (VHT), surpassing Maharashtra skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad's tally of 660 runs made during the 2022-23 season.

Nair also has a chance to overhaul Narayan Jagadeesan's record for the most runs scored in a single season of the VHT -- 830 runs during the 2022-23 edition.

Another heavy score could also further brighten Nair's chances of finding a place in India's one-day side, at least for the home ODIs against England.

However, Karnataka will be eager not to concede that 79 runs (that would surpass Jagadeesan) to Nair as they know that the 33-year-old can hurt them badly if he is allowed for a start. *—PTI*

FROM GOLD TO GLORY

President honours National Sports Awards winners

NEW DELHI, 17 JAN

Manu Bhaker and D Gukesh provided a sprinkling of star-dust but it was India's perseverant para-athletes who walked away with the most boisterous applause when President Droupadi Murmu bestowed the National Sports Awards in a regal ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhavan here on Friday.

Double Olympic-medallist Bhaker, 18-year-old chess world champion Gukesh, men's hockey captain Harmanpreet Singh and Paralympic gold-winning high jumper Praveen Kumar were presented the country's highest sporting honour -- the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna.

The 22-year-old Bhaker became independent India's first athlete to win two medals in a single edition of the Olympics with her bronze-winning show in the 10m air pistol individual and 10m air pistol mixed team events in August last year.

Harmanpreet was a part of the national sides that won bronze medals in the Tokyo as well as Paris Olympics.

President Droupadi Murmu presents Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award to Paralympic gold-winning high jumper Praveen Kumar and chess world champion D Gukesh during the National Sports and Adventure Awards 2024 at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, in New Delhi PHOTO: PTI

Praveen, on the other hand, upgraded his silver at the Japanese capital to a gold in Paris. He was born with a short left leg.

Thirty-two athletes were honoured with the Arjuna Award out of which an unprecedented 17 were para-athletes.

The athletes selected for the Arjuna award included Paris Olympics bronze medal-winning group of wrestler Aman Sehrawat, shooters Swapnil Kusale and Sarabjot Singh (Bhaker's partner in the 10m air pistol mixed competition of Olympics) and the men's hockey team players Jarmanpreet Singh, Sukhjeet Singh, Sanjay and Abhishek.

The most heartwarming moment of the ceremony was when India's first Paralympic gold-medallist Murlikant Petkar walked up to the President on crutches to receive the Arjuna award (lifetime).

Among the most prominent Dronacharya winners this year was shooting coach Deepali Deshpande, who mentored Kusale, and former national football manager Armando Colaco. *—PTI*